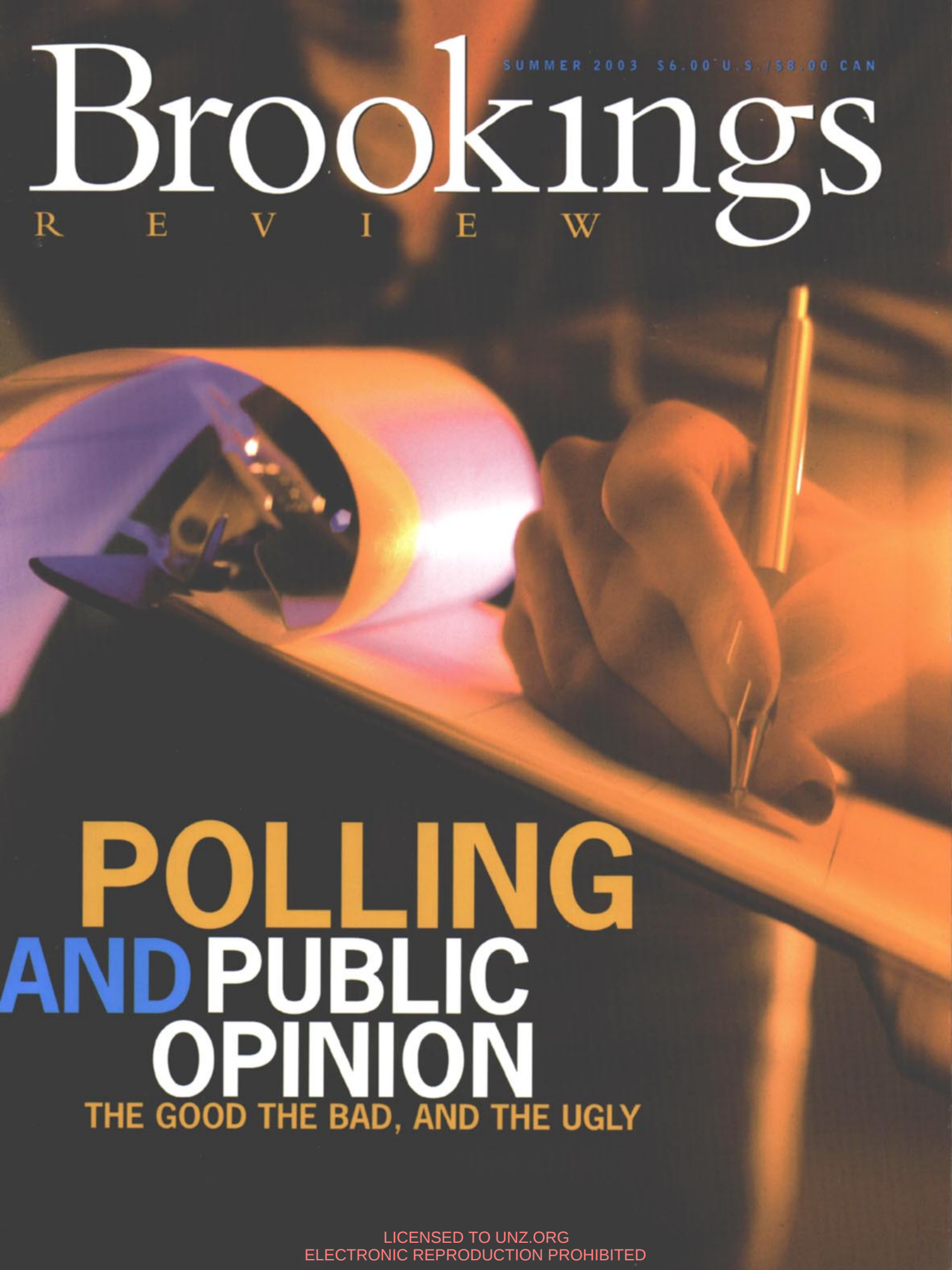




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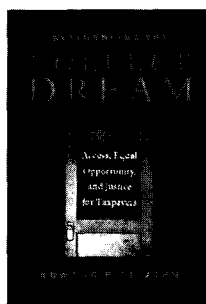
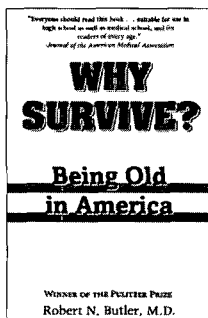
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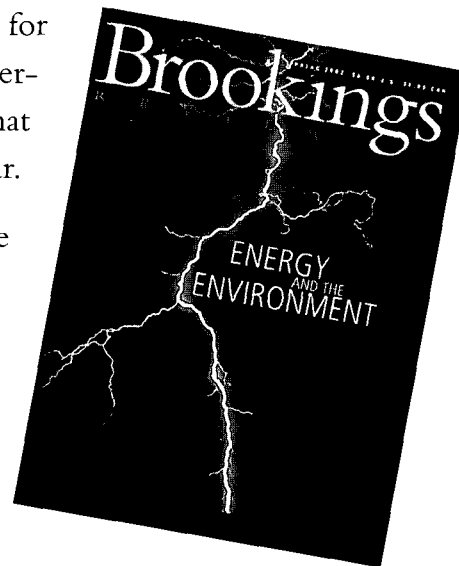
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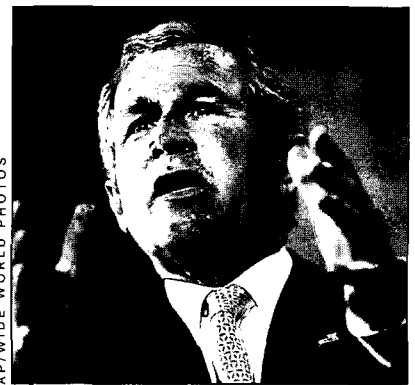
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POLLING & PUBLIC OPINION

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

By Thomas E. Mann and E. J. Dionne, Jr.

If you took a public opinion poll about polls, odds are that a majority would offer some rather unfavorable views of pollsters and the uses to which their work is put. Many potential respondents might simply slam down their telephones. Yet if you asked whether politicians, business leaders, and journalists should pay attention to the people's voices, almost everyone would say yes. And if you then asked whether polls are, at least, one tool through which the wishes of the people can be discerned, a reluctant majority would probably say yes to that too.

Several conundrums of public opinion polling are enfolded in this hypothetical tale. People of all kinds, activists and ordinary citizens alike, regularly cite polls, especially those that find them in the majority. But people are deeply skeptical of polls, especially when opinion moves in the "wrong" direction.

Some of their doubts are about pollsters' methods. Do they ask the right questions? Are they manipulating the wording of questions to get the responses they want? And whom did they interview? Some of the doubts are wrapped up in a mistrust of the political parties, marketers, and media giants that pay for the polls.

The imaginary example also shows that it matters greatly how the pollsters ask their questions. Sometimes, respondents offer opinions on subjects about which they have not

thought much and do not care at all. People sometimes answer pollsters' questions just to be polite—and because they figure they probably ought to have an opinion. That gives pollsters a lot of running room to "manufacture" opinion, especially on issues of narrow rather than wide concern.

Even when people have strong views, a single polling question rarely captures those views well. Human beings are complicated and so are their opinions. Using the findings of our example, enemies of polls could cite the public's doubts to "prove" that the public is against polls. Friends of polls could note that the public, however grudgingly, agrees that polls are one tool for gauging public opinion and that leaders should consult public opinion. They could thus "prove" that the public embraces polls. Both ways of looking at the findings would use reality to distort reality.

This issue of the *Brookings Review* examines how polls work, what they can teach us about public opinion, and what role public opinion does and should play in our democracy. We bring to this magazine a straightforward bias in favor of polling, shaped, in part, by our early professional experiences. Mann spent much of his graduate school time at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center and then conducted polls for congressional candidates in the 1970s. Dionne did graduate work with a heavy focus on public opinion and helped start the *New York Times/CBS News Poll* in 1975. We share a

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belief that the study of what citizens think about politics and policy is a genuine contribution to democracy. It's especially important in democracies whose politicians claim their mandates from the people and regularly insist that they represent the views and interests of the people. To ask the people, with regularity, for their own thoughts strikes us as being both useful and a check on the claims of those in power.

But it is precisely because of our respect for polling that we are disturbed by many things done in its name. When interest groups commission pollsters to

concerned with some matters than others, and most citizens are not continuously engaged in public affairs. Certain obscure questions of public policy, while important, will never engage a mass public. Polling that does not deal with these basic facts of democratic life is producing something other than real information.

Simpler methodological concerns also arise. Some surveys are more carefully produced than others. Quick and cheap surveys and focus groups can be useful to, say, marketers and campaign managers who need information fast—

information driving out the old and impersonal. With the public lacking fixed preferences on many issues, political actors have ample incentive to supply those shortcuts in ways that might broaden support for themselves and the policies they champion.

Relationships between citizens and leaders, between public opinion and democratic governance, are complex. Many fear that contemporary politicians too often put their fingers to the wind of public opinion in deciding what policies to advance. Yet the very fragility and ambiguity of public opinion make the use of polls problematic as a direct, dominant guide to formulating public policy. President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair clearly sought to lead their publics on the need to disarm and depose Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Both largely succeeded.

But pandering to public opinion and leading public opinion do not exhaust the ways in which political leaders and citizens interact. Politicians can be sensitive to underlying public values while leaning against current public preferences. In response to public concerns, they can, as Bush did by going to Congress and to the UN Security Council for authorization to move against Iraq, adjust the process without changing the content of their policy decisions. Politicians and interest group leaders can also shape—and manipulate—public opinion to build broad nominal support for policies mainly serving the interests of their core supporters. This natural dynamic of politics has, in the era of the permanent campaign, dramatically increased the artificiality and disingenuousness of much public discourse.

Polling is a tool, not a principle. The authors in this issue come neither to praise nor to bury polling. They do, however, acknowledge how important it has become in our democracy. They stress Ronald Reagan's "trust but verify" rule. And they urge us to remember the great difference between the idea that the people should rule and the use of polls to determine public policy or manipulate the people's will. We're sure the people agree with us. If you doubt that, just take a poll. ■



ask leading questions to gather "scientific" proof that the public agrees with whatever demand they are making on government, they demean polling and mislead the public. When analysts, sometimes innocently, use poll numbers as a definitive guide to public opinion even on issues to which most people have given little thought, they are writing fiction more than citing fact. When political consultants use information gathered through polling and focus groups to camouflage their clients' controversial policies with soothing, symbol-laden, and misleading rhetoric, they frustrate democratic deliberation.

On many issues the public does not have fully formed and unambiguous views. That does not mean there is anything wrong with the public. In a democracy, citizens are typically more

and know its limits. But it is often difficult for the public and even professionals to be certain about the quality of the data they see, let alone whether broad conclusions from such data are even justified. Declining response rates, emerging technologies, and early voting are posing yet more obstacles for even the most responsible of pollsters.

Public opinion is an illusive commodity. Attempts to measure it, as Samuel Popkin argues in *The Reasoning Voter*, will perforce reveal inconsistency and change. These problems arise, Popkin insists, not because the public is insufficiently educated, informed, or motivated. "Ambivalence is simply an immutable fact of life." As a consequence, citizens use information shortcuts when making decisions in the political arena—with new and personal

Vox Populi

Public Opinion and the Democratic Dilemma

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. . . . The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified." And he said, "Why what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified." So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd . . . Then he released for them Barabbas and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

Matthew 27:15–26

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Thus, Matthew's dramatic rendering of Pilate's accession to the demand of the crowd for the crucifixion of Jesus raises the fundamental dilemma of democratic governance: the relative claims of the wishes of the public and the wisdom of public officials in making policy. That is, what is the appropriate balance between the preferences of citizens and the considered judgment of policymakers?

Some four centuries earlier the same issue had arisen in a society with a more democratic tradition, ancient Athens, and the people had ruled, if less passionately, similarly unwisely. With Athens recovering from a protracted war and experiencing some political turmoil, Socrates stood accused of introducing novel religious practices and corrupting the young. He

chose trial rather than voluntary self-exile. As reported by Plato, Socrates was, despite an eloquent self-defense, found guilty by a jury of 500 citizens and sentenced to die. Although his friends contrived for him to escape from prison, he opted to remain in chains, arguing that while he believed himself innocent, he did not wish to violate a lawful process. Eventually Socrates drank the hemlock.

That we can attribute the condemnation of two men who influenced so profoundly the course of Western civilization to the myopia and suggestibility of ordinary citizens acting collectively might lead us to be skeptical of the capacity of the people for self-government and to infer that we should trust instead in the wisdom of their leaders.

Before writing off the public, however, we should recall that the history of the ancients does not always cast such doubt on the decisions of ordinary people. As related by Thucydides in "The Debate on Mytilene," the Athenians demonstrated

Kay Lehman Schlozman is J. Joseph Moakley Professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at Boston College.



By Kay Lehman Schlozman

Pilate Liberating Barabbas
and Crucifying Christ
from the *Predis Codex* by
Cristoforo de Predis
(1440–86)

superior judgment in their deliberation about the fate of Mytilene, a city on the island of Lesbos that had broken ranks with Athens to join forces with Sparta in the Peloponnesian War. The angry Athenians first made a hasty and unprecedented decision to put to death not only the captured Mytilenian rebels who had incited the revolt but the city's entire adult male population. After dispatching a trireme with the news, however, the Athenians had second thoughts and, following a debate of considerable elevation, rejected a demagogic appeal by Cleon and reversed their original cruel decision. Furthermore, the trials of Jesus and Socrates contain their own ambiguities. Pilate, as the Roman procurator of Judea, did not owe his tenure in office to the potentially unruly crowd to which he deferred and presumably enjoyed considerable autonomy. And the prosecution of Socrates was instigated not by the citizens of Athens but by Anytus, one of the leaders of the restored Athenian democracy, who persuaded the young Meletus to bring the charges.

It All Depends

Given the wealth of examples—ranging from scandalous disregard for democratic process by the Nixon administration during Watergate to the something-for-nothing tax aversion of the public—of venality, shortsightedness, opportunism, and ignorance on the part of both the American people and their democratic leaders, it is not surprising that our political rhetoric displays considerable ambivalence about the dilemma of public opinion and democratic governance. When political leaders alter their stated positions to correspond to the expressed preferences of constituents, are they being responsive or pandering? Is finding the middle ground compromise or selling out? Are public officials who stake out a position at variance with the popular will and then seek to bring the public behind them demonstrating leadership or a stubborn refusal to listen to the people? Are they educating or propagandizing the citizenry?

Our answers inevitably depend on whose ox is being

gored. How we evaluate the politician who sails against the wind of public opinion depends on whether he is Winston Churchill delivering Cassandra-like warnings against the German threat on the eve of World War II or Slobodan Milosevic fomenting ethnic hostility and leading the Serbs into war. Similarly, how we respond to the politician who heeds public reactions depends on whether he is Franklin Roosevelt dropping his unpopular Supreme Court-packing plan or George Wallace attributing his loss in Alabama's 1958 runoff gubernatorial primary to having been "out-segged" by his Klan-backed opponent and vowing never to let it happen again. Churchill was a leader; Milosevic, a demagogue. Roosevelt was responsive; Wallace pandered.

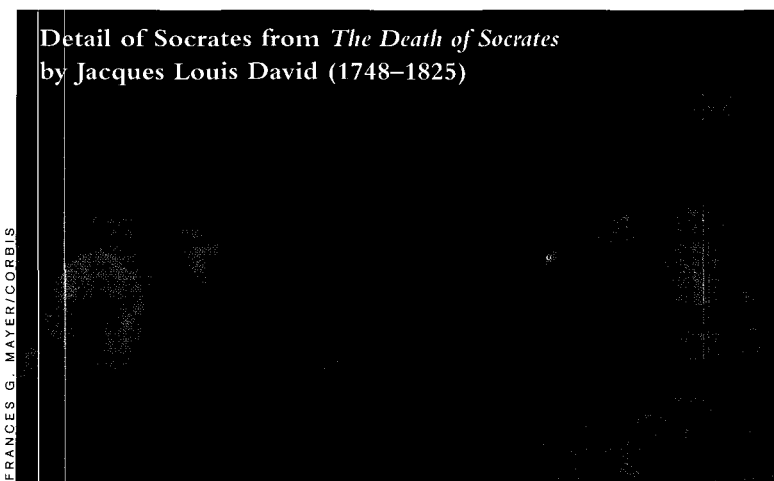
What Do the People Say?

As might be expected, this ambivalence is reflected in what the public says about how the democratic process ought to work. The July–August 2002 issue of *Public Perspective* reports the results of a survey conducted early in 2001 in collaboration with the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation that might suggest that the public comes down overwhelmingly on the side of an "instructed-delegate" version of democracy. Asked "[H]ow much influence do you think the views of the majority of Americans should have on the decisions of elected and government officials in Washington?" fully 68 percent of respondents replied "a great deal," and another 26 percent said "a fair amount." When the question was rephrased and an alternative suggested, however, the consensus evaporated. Forty-two percent believed that elected and government officials should "use their knowledge and judgment to make decisions about what is the best policy to pursue even if this goes against what the majority of the public wants." Fifty-four percent believed that officials should "follow what the majority of the public wants, even if it goes against the officials' knowledge and judgment." When the question was further qualified, the commitment to majoritarian democracy eroded yet again. Reminded that "at times in the past, the majority of Americans have held positions later judged to be wrong, such as their support of racial segregation of blacks and whites," 40 percent opined that "officials in Washington should do what the majority wants because the majority is usually right," while 51 percent replied that "officials [should] rely on their knowledge and judgment when they think the majority is wrong." Just to muddy the waters further, 23 percent of respondents agreed strongly that "elected officials consult polls because they believe the public should have a say in what government does," and 58 percent agreed strongly that "the main reason officials consult polls is because they want to stay popular and get re-elected." Although these two findings were presented under the heading "Cynicism," it could be easily argued that both represent forms of democratic responsiveness.

The emergence and refinement of the public opinion poll would seem to give the contemporary political leader who wishes to be responsive an important edge over such historical counterparts as the Ottoman Sultans, said to have disguised themselves to go out among their people, or George Washing-

ton, who would occasionally get on his horse to make soundings among the citizenry. Nevertheless, the *Public Perspective* survey suggests that the public has, at best, mixed views about opinion polls. On one hand, 76 percent of respondents indicated that polls are very or somewhat useful "for elected and government officials to understand how the public feels about important issues." And 83 percent agreed strongly or somewhat that "public opinion polling is far from perfect, but it is one of the best means for communicating what the public is thinking." On the other hand, 53 percent believed that opinion polls "accurately reflect what the public thinks" only some of the time and another 11 percent, that they hardly ever do. Moreover, 80 percent agreed strongly or somewhat that "the questions asked in polls don't give people the opportunity to say what they really think about an issue." Asked to choose among a variety of alternatives, only 25 percent selected public opinion polls as "the best way for officials to learn what the majority of people think about important issues," compared with 43 percent who chose town hall meetings.

Detail of Socrates from *The Death of Socrates*
by Jacques Louis David (1748–1825)



The public's lukewarm view of polls also emerges from the answers to a battery of eight items in the *Public Perspective* survey about the information sources to which public officials should pay attention when making decisions about important issues. Thirty-eight percent of respondents thought officials should pay a great deal of attention to public opinion polls. Coming in first—ahead not only of public opinion polls but also of journalists, lobbyists, campaign contributors, and officials' own conscience or judgment—were "members of the public who contact them about the issue." Of those surveyed, 58 percent said that public officials should pay a great deal of attention (and 32 percent, a fair amount of attention) to people who get in touch with them, a finding that raises another aspect of the democratic dilemma. It is well known that those who contact a public official are unlikely to represent a random sample of public opinion about the matter. They are, among other things, more likely to care intensely and to have relatively extreme views. To pay them special heed would be, in many cases, to oppose the preferences of the majority.

The relative weight to be given to the views of a rather

indifferent majority—as opposed to the views of a minority deeply concerned about a policy controversy—is a puzzle of long standing in democratic theory. The Framers of the Constitution showed considerable solicitude for minority viewpoints, and concern about the dangers of a majority faction informs Madison's *Federalist* No. 10. Once again, however, it matters whose ox is being gored. Many people will urge deference to the wishes of either the intense minority that opposes handgun control or the intense minority that opposes school prayer, but not to both. In environmental conflicts, I have differing amounts of sympathy for various intensely concerned interests: the Midwestern utilities whose pollutants result in the acid rain that is killing my favorite New England ponds; the snowmobilers whose recreational tastes I do not share; and the commercial fishermen whose plight has been explained by the congressman we share and who provide savory fare for my table.

Whether democratic leaders do respond to public opinion elicits no more agreement than whether they should. Various academic studies can be adduced to demonstrate strong links between public opinion and the actions of policymakers. These analyses proceed from the implicit assumption that policymakers, especially elected officials, feel constrained to pursue policy objectives congruent with—or, at least,

plex that no single pattern obtains for the relationship between public opinion and policy, and the appropriate goal is to specify the circumstances under which public opinion places broad or narrow limits on a public official's actions. For example, we might inquire as to the nature of the constituency that matters for democratic responsiveness: the public of the whole nation, state, or municipality; the electoral district; or the partisan majority that elected the official. Moreover, issues differ—in their complexity, their visibility, and their salience to the public at large and to various groups within the public. Presumably, policymakers are more likely to be constrained by opinion when issues are highly visible and widely salient. When complexity is added to the equation, however, public officials may gain freedom to act—so long as they do something. As exemplified by recent federal legislation on both education and homeland security, the public wanted action and was impatient with congressional stalemate. Whether the resulting policies reflect public preferences—and whether they will address complex problems successfully—is not fully clear. Ironically, although we would expect policymakers to be more likely to be obliged to follow public opinion when issues are visible and salient, on certain visible issues, such as abortion, they may be compelled not to put a finger to the wind, but rather to remain steadfast to the dictates of conscience.

Just as issues differ, so do political actions and policy arenas.

What is the appropriate balance between the preferences of citizens and the considered judgment of policymakers?

seemingly congruent with—the preferences of their constituents. Some of these studies aggregate across a variety of issues. They show, for example, that, with a variety of factors taken into account, states where the public leans in a liberal (or conservative) direction tend to enact policies that reflect

the overall tilt in public preferences. In addition, studies demonstrate that abrupt ideological shifts in public mood tend to produce subsequent policy changes in the corresponding direction. Furthermore, inquiries into the politics of particular policies, from Medicare to welfare to civil rights, find evidence for responsiveness to public opinion by public officials. But other analysts reach the opposite conclusion. Their studies stress a variety of themes: that the general public lacks the time and political concern to have informed and detailed opinions about multiple policy issues; that policymakers are more responsive to the attentive publics—campaign funders, lobbyists, and other policy activists—whose support is critical than to the public at large; and that policymakers can shape public opinion by using the media as well as polls and focus groups to craft messages that placate public opinion while maximizing autonomy.

No Simple Answers

The way to reconcile what might seem to be discrepant findings is to argue not that the truth lies in the middle, but that it all depends. Policymaking in America is so diverse and com-

plex that no single pattern obtains for the relationship between public opinion and policy, and the appropriate goal is to specify the circumstances under which public opinion places broad or narrow limits on a public official's actions. For example, we might inquire as to the nature of the constituency that matters for democratic responsiveness: the public of the whole nation, state, or municipality; the electoral district; or the partisan majority that elected the official. Moreover, issues differ—in their complexity, their visibility, and their salience to the public at large and to various groups within the public. Presumably, policymakers are more likely to be constrained by opinion when issues are highly visible and widely salient. When complexity is added to the equation, however, public officials may gain freedom to act—so long as they do something. As exemplified by recent federal legislation on both education and homeland security, the public wanted action and was impatient with congressional stalemate. Whether the resulting policies reflect public preferences—and whether they will address complex problems successfully—is not fully clear. Ironically, although we would expect policymakers to be more likely to be obliged to follow public opinion when issues are visible and salient, on certain visible issues, such as abortion, they may be compelled not to put a finger to the wind, but rather to remain steadfast to the dictates of conscience.

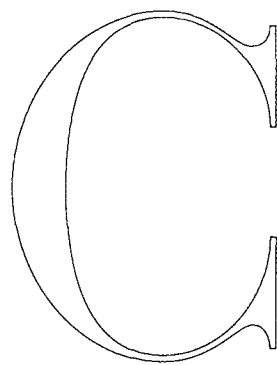
Just as issues differ, so do political actions and policy arenas. Once again, visibility would seem to be a key factor. Legislators who feel constrained to follow their constituencies when a roll call vote is taken in the House may have more maneuvering room when a bill is marked up in subcommittee or when a narrow provision is slipped into an omnibus piece of legislation. A decision by an obscure administrative unit of the executive branch would seem less likely to receive public scrutiny than would an executive order. Moreover, policymakers in different offices are accountable to the public in different ways. Judges, especially those who serve for life, surely have more autonomy from public opinion than do legislators, though even judges are limited in the extent to which they can fly in the face of deeply held public preferences.

These conjectures suggest the many dimensions that must be taken into account when specifying the circumstances under which policymakers are likely to pay attention to public preferences; to heed the pleadings of attentive special publics, their fellow partisans, or other political allies; and to exercise independent judgment.

More years ago than I care to remember, when I studied the writing of the Constitution in 11th-grade U.S. history, I naively asked my teacher, "Are the people we send to Congress supposed to do what we want them to do or are they supposed to do what they think is best?" I do not remember exactly what my teacher replied. I know that I did not get a satisfactory answer. I still do not have one. ■

Can We Trust the It All

By Michael W. Traugott



Can we trust the polls? Under the best of circumstances, the answer is “Not necessarily without a fair amount of detailed information about how they were conducted.” This general note of caution applies at any time to any poll consumer. But today, with polls proliferating in the media and with methodological concerns increasing within the polling industry, caution is even more warranted. This is not to suggest that the general quality of polling data is declining or that the problems facing pollsters have no answers. Still, consumers of polling data need to be more careful than ever.

Proliferating Polls

In a period of rapidly advancing technology and falling costs for computers, long-distance telephone service, and statistical software, it is easier than ever for start-up companies to get into the polling business. Because most polling now takes place on the telephone, it is cheap and easy for someone who wants to get into the polling business to buy a

sample, write a short questionnaire for a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) application, buy interviewing services from a field house, and receive a report based on the marginals for each question and a limited set of cross-tabulations.

As a consequence, the opportunity to see the results of a poorly conducted poll has become more frequent, even if we can't assess exactly whether the probability of seeing one has changed. The problem is exacerbated because journalists and others who report on public opinion are not generally well

trained in assessing poll results and thus cannot always weed out “bad” poll results before they enter the news stream and become “fact.” So the risk is growing that local polls on national or local issues may be less well conducted or less well reported than those conducted by major national organizations.

Neither poll consumers nor journalists who write about polls have access to quality-control criteria or certification processes by which to assess specific firms or individuals. As a result, all must rely on news organizations to evaluate polls on the basis of the standards of dis-

Michael W. Traugott is professor of communication studies and political science at the University of Michigan and senior research scientist at the Institute for Social Research.

Polls? Depends

closure of poll results adopted by organizations like the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and the National Council of Public Polls (NCPPI). And they should report any concerns they have about such items. Information thus made available on details such as sampling, question wording, field dates, and response rates is useful for the few informed poll consumers who can interpret it.

Declining Response Rates

Falling response rates are a concern for the entire survey research industry,

whether academic researchers, political consultants who work for candidates, or news organizations. Recent compilations of response rates in telephone surveys by the Council for Marketing and Opinion Research suggest that studies with short field periods are now averaging about 10 percent, although most media polls have response rates in the 30–45 percent range. Although analysts have identified many factors behind this long-term trend—such as the negative impacts of telemarketers posing as pollsters and the increased use of various call-screening devices—we don't yet

understand well how much each contributes to the overall decline. Researchers are also beginning to understand that declining participation rates probably affect different kinds of political polls in different ways.

For preelection polls that project the outcome of a race, preliminary research suggests that the same factors that may lower participation in surveys may also lower participation in elections. Declining response rates thus do not seem to pose dangers to the accuracy of estimates of the outcome of recent presidential elections. More research will help clarify whether declining participation will affect preelection estimates in lower-turnout elections held in non-presidential years or whether over time it will have different effects on future preelection estimates.

Preelection polls are unusual in that their accuracy can be checked against the outcome of the election itself. (That characteristic may create a misplaced confidence in polling generally, since similar external validations do not apply in many other polling situations.) When it comes to polling on issues of general government policy, we do not know the potential impact of declining survey participation rates because we have no way to check the accuracy of the polls. For example, when polls assess the public's response to or appraisal of policies such as military action in Iraq or a proposed tax cut, there is no equivalent independent way to measure the validity of the measurements. There is, however, some suggestion that policy polling results may reflect more conservative or Republican views than are present in the population as a whole—a bias that would not be surprising because Republicans have long been known to be more likely to vote than Democrats (a fact accounted for in the likelihood estimators used by most polling firms).

Emerging Technology

Many polling organizations embrace new technology as a way to cut costs and speed data collection. Some new technologies also make it possible to collect more types of data. Web-based surveys, for example, can employ visual

or audio stimuli that are not possible with other questionnaire designs, making them an excellent way to evaluate political commercials, especially when applied in a full experimental design. Many organizations have also turned to Web-based surveys to reduce the turnaround time between the design of a questionnaire and the start of data analysis and production of a first report of results.

Applied inappropriately, however, this technology offers several potential pitfalls for data quality. First and foremost are sampling issues related to respondent selection. Pollsters obtain respondents in three ways. They take “volunteers” who self-select themselves to answer generally available questionnaires on a Web site. They recruit volunteers, sometimes for a single survey and sometimes for a panel from which subsequent samples will be drawn. And they use a probability sample to select respondents on the telephone and supply Internet access to those who need it.

Because the availability of Web connections is not uniformly or randomly distributed in society, the existence of a “digital divide” can introduce one source of bias in volunteer samples. This technique, for example, tends to produce samples that are more Republican and with more conservative leanings, as we have seen in such varied circumstances as post-debate polls in 2000 and more general public policy assessments since. The resulting bias tends to favor the current Bush administration and could work against a Democratic administration. Other possible problems include fatigue from the requirement to respond to periodic and frequent surveys to maintain panel status—a requirement that could even lead, in some circumstances, to “professional” respondents. More research needs to be done on these issues, but at a minimum a poll consumer ought to know about respondent recruitment and selection for Web-based surveys.

Pollsters must also contend with the rise of cell phones. Despite the increasing penetration of these devices in the United States (approaching 75 percent), fewer than 5 percent of Americans rely

solely on a cell phone. But that share is growing—and presenting pollsters with a new set of problems. First, cell phone exchanges have no general directory, and they are excluded from samples that most public polling firms can buy. Second, people who rely on cell phones are more mobile than the rest of the population, and many use phones provided by their business. If, as is likely, the geographical correspondence between the phones’ assigned area codes and their owners’ place of residence is poor, it may or may not be an issue for firms conducting surveys with national samples, but it could be for those conducting state or local surveys and effectively dialing out of their target area.

One further problem linked to new technology is telephone caller ID. This screening device, which alerts households to who is calling, makes it possible to avoid calls from “out of their area” or from unfamiliar numbers. In response to citizens’ pleas for protection from telemarketers, the federal government is moving to develop a “do not call” list. Pollsters need not honor such list membership now, but future abuses by pollsters or telemarketers could change that. This technology too is exerting downward pressure on response rates.

New Voting Methods and Preelection Pollsters

Preelection pollsters face two relatively new problems, both of which they can manage by devoting more financial resources to their work. Whether firms will be willing to pay more to collect data with less error or bias remains to be seen.

For almost 10 years, new administrative procedures have been allowing Americans to change the way they cast their ballots. Increasingly, citizens are voting before election day—or rather, as it is coming to mean, “Vote Counting Day.”

Through procedures such as “early voting” (where machines are set up in convenient locations such as malls or shopping centers as early as three weeks before election day), voting by mail (where every registered voter is sent a ballot up to 20 days before election day), and permanent absentee registration

(where voters can ask to be mailed a ballot in advance of election day without indicating that they will be out of town), more and more voters are casting ballots early. In the 2000 election, about one-sixth of the national electorate voted early, and the share is growing. In selected states, the proportion can be much greater. This trend is also facilitated by other administrative changes, such as election day registration, whereby citizens can decide at the last minute that they want to vote, even if they have not previously registered.

These developments do not mean that preelection telephone polls are outmoded or will fade away. They do suggest that telephone pollsters will have to use hybrid designs that include different screening questions (Have you voted yet? Are you registered to vote in the upcoming election?). Voter News Service used such techniques in past elections, as did firms in large states—such as California, Texas, and Florida—with many early voters. Eventually telephone polls may be supplemented by exit polls of voters leaving early voting sites. Such problems are not insurmountable, but they imply added expense as well as the need for more sophisticated designs, which will likely complicate modeling the outcome of elections based on more and more disparate data sources.

A second issue for preelection pollsters—one that cropped up in the 2002 election—is the development by the Republican Party of 24-Hour Task Forces to counter union-based get-out-the-vote campaigns. Volunteer recruits were solicited on the Internet to make at least three calls in the final 72 hours of the campaign to encourage likely Republican voters to get to the polls. The effectiveness of these efforts has not been analyzed systematically, but they may have been of use in at least some states, especially in the South. The difficulty is that preelection pollsters, especially those linked to newspapers, traditionally poll up through Friday or Saturday to produce a story for Sunday’s paper. Because their polling typically ends just as these mobilization efforts get under way, their polls could underestimate the Republican share of the vote.

Pollsters could counter the problem by extending the period for preelection polling, even through Monday evening, but that would defy a set of news-making norms about the best time to publish stories about the campaign to reach the largest audience. And it also would increase data collection costs.

Exit Pollsters

Exit polls serve two distinct functions: they provide information on who won the election, and they explain that success. Exit polling was developed as a technique to intercept individual voters as they left the polls in samples of precincts. Since the late 1960s, exit polling has given electronic media a big edge in election coverage, including the ability to produce news about outcomes long before all votes have been counted. But the information collected and analyzed by exit pollsters is useful not only for projecting races but also for analyzing voter intent and behavior by attitudinal characteristics as well as a full set of demographic factors.

Much work remains before the news media are prepared to use exit polling to analyze voting in the 2004 presidential election. The work is crucial, for the exit polls—in their explanatory function, not their predictive one—have become an independent voice of the public in explaining what happened and why. Without that voice, journalists and political commentators will revert to the old style of political reporting, relying on party officials and strategists to provide the causal links and explanations for why one party or candidate succeeded over another.

During the past two elections, the Voter News Service exit poll operation was dogged by two problems. Each was identified as part of the post-2000 reviews both internally and in congressional testimony, and neither is yet solved. The first was whether the administrative software and hardware that had been supporting VNS (still a DOS-based system for a mainframe computer) were up to the task. The second, one that still has not received much discussion, was whether the statistical modeling of the VNS system

was adequate. For the VNS projections were based not only on exit poll interviews, but also on statistical modeling that incorporated a detailed history for each precinct, including information on turnout and partisan division of the vote over time; prior estimates of the outcome of each race, based on intelligence that included preelection polls and a variety of expert assessments; and, in very close races, raw vote totals. Although these models were conceptually appropriate, they did not use the very latest statistical theories and models, as does, for example, Britain's BBC.

Soon after election day 2002, the networks began another review, eventually deciding to disband VNS. In its place, they have agreed to support a new exit poll operation, the National Elections Pool (NEP), to be headed by Warren Mitofsky and Joe Lenski, two veterans with both national and international experience. But more public discussion is needed about whether to revise the statistical models for the new operation.

The task for Mitofsky and Lenski is not enviable. The old VNS software system, whatever its current ownership and availability, was not up to the task of handling large amounts of data with current technology. And in 2002 VNS on its own was unable, even with almost two years' notice, to develop a new system to produce relatively few estimates for an off-year election. The coming presidential caucuses and primaries give the new team less than a year to develop another new system to produce a larger number of improved estimates—though Mitofsky and Lenski were able to provide such a service for CNN in 2002 for 10 states through their "RealVote" system. And because the new team is likely to focus primarily on data collection and processing, it will devote less time and effort to the estimation models.

Whatever happens, the new organization is still likely to produce the only estimates of outcomes and explanations, and that too is a problem. At least one other source should collect data independently to produce another estimate of the outcomes. The other source should also use a different questionnaire, in theory reflect-

ing additional news judgments about appropriate content. The two estimates together would provide a fuller explanation and more reliable estimates of what happened and why.

The Internationalization of Polling

The recent military action in Iraq has increased news organizations' interest in what foreign publics, especially those in the Middle East or in states such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, think about the United States and its policies. But the polling industry in these regions is not yet well developed and typically relies on samples drawn from a few major urban areas rather than country-wide. The National Council of Public Polls has recently suggested that the issue may often be a pragmatic one for the data collection firm. In addition to cutting travel costs, these simpler designs may also reduce translation and language problems. But the resulting data also require journalists wishing to report about what others think of Americans to be careful about the level and type of generalizations they draw.

More Polls, More Problems

Public opinion polls, frequently conducted and with results that are widely disseminated, are one distinguishing feature of a healthy democracy. They provide a means for citizens to communicate with their elected representatives, and vice versa. But their value in this regard depends on the collection of high-quality data, well analyzed and appropriately interpreted.

Of late there has been a step-function increase in the availability of polls, accompanied by issues of potential reductions in quality. Such developments are not unprecedented: new technologies have before, and will again, become available to produce data faster and cheaper, while the resulting savings are not devoted to reducing various kinds of error. No one yet fully understands what the consequences might be of the various problems outlined above. Poll consumers, as ever, have no recourse but to pay as much attention as they can to where the data came from and how they were analyzed. ■

IS “POPULAR RULE” Polls, Political Psychology, and

The celebrated political philosopher H. L. Mencken once characterized democracy as “the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.” Democratic theorists have mostly focused on the latter issue, without taking seriously the complexities lurking beneath the notion that “the common people know what they want.” The ubiquity of opinion polls probing every conceivable aspect of modern politics and government both reflects and reinforces the notion that the primary problem of modern democracy is to translate definite public preferences into policy. Leaders may ignore the dictates of public opinion, but they are assumed to do so only with good reason—and at their electoral peril.

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20–25
PERCENT OF THE
RESPONDENTS
EACH YEAR SAID THAT
TOO LITTLE WAS
BEING SPENT ON
“WELFARE”
By Larry M. Bartels

My aim here is to suggest that this conventional view of democracy is fundamentally unrealistic. Whether it would be desirable to have a democracy based on public opinion is beside the point, because public opinion of the sort necessary to make it possible simply does not exist. The very idea of “popular rule” is starkly inconsistent with the understanding of political psychology provided by the past half-century of research by psychologists and political scientists. That research offers no reason to doubt that citizens have meaningful values and beliefs, but ample reason to doubt that those values and beliefs are sufficiently complete and coherent to serve as a satisfactory starting point for democratic theory. In other words, citizens have attitudes but not preferences—a distinction directly inspired by the work of psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. My argument extends Kahneman and Tversky’s research, which challenges the behavioral assumptions underlying conventional economic theory, to the realm of politics and emphasizes particularly the challenge it poses to the most fundamental assumptions of democratic theory.

“Framing Effects”

Kahneman and Tversky have called attention to “framing

POSSIBLE? Democracy

63-65
PERCENT
SAID THAT
TOO LITTLE
WAS BEING
SPENT ON
"ASSISTANCE
TO THE POOR"

effects"—situations in which different ways of posing, or "framing," a policy issue produce distinctly different public responses. Framing effects are hard to accommodate within a theory built on the assumption that citizens have definite preferences to be elicited; but they are easy to reconcile with the view that any given question may tap a variety of more or less relevant attitudes. The problem for democratic theory is that the fluidity and contingency of attitudes make it impossible to discern meaningful public preferences on issues of public policy, because seemingly arbitrary variations in choice format or context may produce contradictory expressions of popular will.

Survey researchers have been generating examples of framing effects for several decades in experimental work on question wording and question ordering. But only recently have they begun to think of them as manifestations of more general psychological phenomena—especially of the fundamental context-dependency of attitudes. The normative implications of question-wording and question-ordering effects for our understanding of democracy remain virtually unexplored.

Framing effects can be demonstrated most simply by noting the impact on survey responses of prompting respondents to consider some particular aspect of an issue that might other-

wise have been overlooked. In a classic 1950 study by Herbert Hyman and Paul Sheatsley, half of a national sample was asked, "Do you think the United States should let Communist newspaper reporters from other countries come in here and send back to their papers the news as they see it?" To that question, 36 percent said yes. The other half of the sample was asked the same question, but only after being asked whether "a Communist country like Russia should let American newspaper reporters come in and send back to America the news as they see it." In this second group, 90 percent agreed that American reporters should be allowed in Russia, and 73 percent—twice the share in the first half-sample—said that communist reporters should be allowed to work in the United States. Clearly, asking first about American reporters in Russia prompted respondents in the second group to apply a norm of reciprocity that blunted (though it did not entirely supplant) strong anti-communist attitudes.

What are we to make of this? Let us imagine for a moment that a referendum is proposed to settle the question of whether communist reporters should be allowed to work in the United States. Would the appropriate reflection of public sentiment be the 36 percent support for the proposal considered alone, or the 73 percent support after the norm of reciprocity has been stimulated? I suspect that most observers would consider the latter result more legitimate, on the view that it incorporates at least one additional consideration that citizens should consider relevant—and do consider relevant when it is brought to their attention. Then would a context that stimulated still other considerations be even more appropriate? Which others? Given the practical impossibility of stimulating every consideration that is logically relevant (or might be considered relevant by someone), how might we judge whether one set of considerations is better than another?

What's in a Name?

Even more perplexing issues arise when the original question is not merely elaborated but altered. Some of the most striking framing effects on record come from question-wording experiments conducted as part of the 1984, 1985, and 1986 General Social Surveys. Respondents were asked whether "we" are spending "too much, too little, or about the right amount" on each of a variety of government programs. Separate random subsamples evaluated essentially similar sets of programs, but with more or less subtle differences in how each was denoted. Some of these subtle differences produced large differences in apparent public opinion. Most spectacularly, while only 20-25 percent of the respondents each year said that too little was being spent on "welfare," 63-65 percent said that too little was being spent on "assistance to the poor."

"Welfare" clearly has deeply unpopular connotations for significant segments of the American public and evokes rather different mental images than does "assistance to the poor." But these different images are attached to the same set of programs and policies; any effort to make subtle distinctions of substance between "welfare" and "assistance to the poor" seems fruit-

lessly tendentious. Nevertheless, one frame suggests that a substantial majority of the public supports spending more on those programs, while the other—equally legitimate on its face—suggests that the same programs are deeply unpopular. What should a democratic theorist make of this perplexing situation? How might either question—or either outcome—be judged more appropriate than the other?

Sometimes even more arbitrary choices of question wording can produce large differences in opinion. Most people, for example, would presumably acknowledge that “forbidding” an action is substantively equivalent to “not allowing” it. But as Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser have noted, in three separate split-sample experiments in the mid-1970s, between 44 percent and 48 percent of the American public would “not allow” a communist to give a speech, while only about half that share would “forbid” him or her to do so. Substantively identical questions produce markedly different results. Which result reflects the public’s “true” opinion? I can suggest no sensible way to answer that question.

I interpret these framing effects as evidence for the thesis that citizens have attitudes rather than preferences. The contrasting patterns of responses documented in a variety of opinion surveys and experiments reflect real attitudes. The attitudes are neither meaningless nor whimsical nor—at least in any common-language sense—irrational. But neither are they the solid bedrock of comprehensive, logically consistent preferences that most liberal political theorists have taken as a starting point for democratic theory.

No Issue Is Immune

How ubiquitous are these framing effects? Are the examples cited here simply carefully selected anomalies, or are they the tips of icebergs? There is good reason to be wary of overgeneralization, given the wide variety of political issues and choice contexts in any functioning democracy, as well as the striking variation in information, motivation, and cognitive capacity in any mass public. But if these framing effects reflect fundamental aspects of the psychology of attitudes, they should appear with some frequency even in situations that seem ripe for the assumption that citizens have complete and consistent preferences over policy outcomes. This point may be dramatized by drawing examples from two issue areas often seen as prime exceptions to the generally disorganized and fluid character of American public opinion—abortion and affirmative action. The vagaries of survey responses evident even in these realms of unusual salience and concreteness reinforce the notion that public opinion is inherently sensitive to arbitrary aspects of how political issues are framed and political objects denoted.

Some of the complexities running beneath the surface of public opinion even on abortion are suggested by Paul Freedman and Ken Goldstein’s analysis of responses to two questions on the topic in American National Election Study surveys. In response to a general question about abortion in the 1996 survey, about 40 percent of respondents said that “by law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of per-

sonal choice.” However, in response to a different abortion question posed in 1997, 39 percent of these same 1996 pro-choice respondents favored “a proposed law to ban certain types of late-term abortions, sometimes called partial birth abortions.” (Of the remaining pro-choice respondents, 49 percent opposed a ban on partial birth abortions; 12 percent were undecided.) That is, a substantial fraction of those who believed that abortions should “always” be permitted “as a matter of personal choice” also believed that “partial birth abortions” should be banned. While it might be possible to render these two positions logically consistent (for example, by stipulating the availability of some practical alternative to partial birth abortions in situations where they are now being chosen), it seems more straightforward simply to acknowledge that when it comes to public opinion, “always” never means always.

Perhaps these apparent contradictions in public opinion would disappear if political discourse were somehow elevated—but I doubt it. Political elites have had about as much chance of providing a clarifying debate on abortion as they have on any issue before the American public—without producing, at least by the evidence of Freedman and Goldstein, any clear reconciliation of the powerful competing values at stake.

Nor is it obvious how one could clarify public preferences regarding abortion policy through more careful question writing. Some of the ambiguities inherent in any such attempt at clarification are suggested by another analysis of data from the 1997 National Election Study survey, this one by Virginia Sapiro. Half the respondents were asked to rate “opponents of abortion” and “supporters of abortion” on a 100-point “feeling thermometer”; the other half were asked to rate “pro-life people” and “pro-choice people.” It seems fruitless to deny that these are, in essence, alternative ways of tapping exactly the same substantive attitudes. Nevertheless, Sapiro found that they produced significantly different results, with both “pro-life” and “pro-choice” people being rated much more favorably than abortion “opponents” or “supporters,” respectively. The differences appeared consistently among men and women, among more and less politically informed respondents, and among those who were themselves opponents and supporters of abortion. While these differences testify to the success of the rhetorical strategies adopted by abortion partisans in labeling themselves as “pro-choice” and “pro-life,” they do nothing to justify one’s faith in the reality of public attitudes toward them independent of the particular words by which they are denoted.

From Opinion Polls to Referenda

One might still object that questions in opinion surveys are a far cry from real political decisions and that peculiar responses to survey questions even about an issue as salient and fundamental as abortion have little genuine relevance for democratic theory. That objection seems to me misguided in both its aspects. Although most consequential decisions in democracies are made by representatives, and not directly by citizens in policy referenda, theories of representation are almost invariably

grounded in analogous choices of policies by representatives, or of representatives by citizens, or both. As long as we continue to evaluate democracy in terms of the correspondence between citizens' preferences and policy outcomes, all the same theoretical problems will reappear when we attempt to specify what kind of representation is most democratic. In any case, even if the specific formats and substantive content of the questions in some of the examples cited bear little superficial resemblance to the questions put to citizens in policy referenda or to representatives in the legislative arena, there is no reason to suppose that the same conceptual problems do not arise in posing "real" political issues.

The practical reality of these conceptual problems is illustrated by a 1997 referendum on affirmative action programs in Houston. As reported on November 6 in the *New York Times* by Sam Howe Verhovek, "the future of affirmative action may depend more than anything else on the language in which it is framed."

The vote Tuesday came only after a tumultuous debate in the City Council over the wording of the measure. Rather than being asked whether they wanted to ban discrimination and "preferential treatment," to which voters said a clear "yes" in California last year and to which polls showed Houston voters would also say yes, residents were instead asked whether they wished specifically to ban affirmative action in city contracting and hiring.

The legal effect was the same under either wording, but to this revised question they answered "no" by 55 percent to 45 percent. . . .

Affirmative-action proponents around the nation hailed not just the result of Houston's vote, but the phrasing of the referendum as a straight up-or-down call on affirmative action, and they said that is the way the question should be put to voters elsewhere.

Its opponents, meanwhile, who are already in court challenging the City Council's broad rewording as illegal, denounced it as a heavy-handed way of obscuring the principles that were really at stake.

Who is to decide what principles are "really at stake" in such a policy choice? If we accept, for the sake of argument, that a referendum using the original wording "taken almost directly from the Civil Rights Act of 1964" would have passed, as most observers seem to have believed, would that result have been more or less legitimate than the actual result? These questions are of a piece with those raised by the research of psychologists and public opinion researchers. Political elites who pose referendum questions must frame complex, difficult political issues in specific, concrete language. If citizens had definite, preexisting preferences regarding the underlying issues, any reasonable choice of language might elicit those preferences equally well. But democracy with attitudes requires some more detailed, normatively compelling account of what makes one frame more appropriate than another as a basis for democratic choice. In the absence of such an account, political debate and policy choice become a rhetorical free-for-all—a practical art in which, at best, the ends justify the means.

Democracy Camp?

Some political philosophers have proposed deliberative procedures that might be thought of as embodying normative theories of appropriate contexts for democratic choice. James Fishkin has proposed and implemented a "deliberative opinion poll" bringing random samples of citizens together with experts and moderators to study and discuss important political issues. The views expressed by these citizens after they have deliberated are taken to reflect "what the public would think, if it had a more adequate chance to think about the questions at issue."

One may be tempted to wonder how adequately a few days of democracy camp would resolve the paradoxes and uncertainties summarized here. Would Fishkin's moderators reconcile conflicting attitudes toward "welfare" and "assistance to the poor," much less "forbidding" and "not allowing"? Would they discover some latent public consensus regarding the wording of Houston's referendum on affirmative action?

More generally, the hopeful assertions of democratic theorists regarding the positive effects of deliberation are largely unsupported by systematic empirical evidence. Indeed, most observers of political deliberation have painted a much less rosy portrait than philosophers of deliberative democracy. New England town meetings apparently involve a good deal of false unanimity, with most important decisions settled in advance through informal networks reflecting preexisting inequalities in social status and political power. The atmosphere of public-spiritedness and mutual respect central to theorists' accounts of democratic deliberation may be difficult or impossible to achieve in societies burdened by sexism, racism, and fundamental cultural schisms.

Popular Rule—Or Popular Veto?

The realization that attitude expressions are powerfully (and, in my view, intrinsically and unavoidably) context-dependent should spur democratic theorists to specify more clearly how political issues ought to be framed. Theoretical work along these lines may be inspired and informed by relevant empirical research, but first and foremost it will require a more subtle specification of the moral grounds on which one political context or institution might be deemed superior to another. It will not be sufficient to evaluate contexts or institutions by reference to their success or failure in reflecting citizens' preferences, since that is merely to beg the question.

The most obvious alternative to theoretical progress along these lines is a much-diluted version of democratic theory in which the ideal of "popular rule" is replaced by what William Riker once characterized as "an intermittent, sometimes random, even perverse, popular veto" on the machinations of political elites. If that sort of democracy is the best we can hope for, we had better reconcile ourselves to the fact. On the other hand, if we insist on believing that democracy can provide some attractive and consistent normative basis for evaluating policy outcomes, we had better figure out more clearly what we are talking about. ■

Only one-sixth of the respondents to a January 12, 2003, poll for the Knight-Ridder newspapers knew that none of the September 11 terrorist hijackers was an Iraqi citizen. One-third said they did not know whether the hijackers were Iraqis, and almost half (44 percent) said that some or most of them were from Iraq. Almost two-thirds thought that “Iraq and Al Qaeda—Osama bin Laden’s organization—are allied and working together to plan new acts of terrorism.” And two-

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thirds said that the United States should “take military action to disarm Iraq and ensure that it cannot threaten other countries with nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons.”

It is hard to know exactly how far these beliefs were causally linked—to what extent the plurality belief that some or most of the hijackers were from Iraq led to the majority belief that Iraq was allied with Al Qaeda and from that in turn to the majority belief that the United States should take military action to disarm Iraq. But the combination of support for military action with such striking ignorance and misinformation is troubling—the more so, considering that two-thirds of the same Knight-Ridder respondents thought they had “a good understanding of the arguments for and against going to war with Iraq.”

Strong feelings undergirded by scanty knowledge are hardly new to

American public opinion about foreign policy. In a book and article of the mid-1950s, Harold Isaacs found among Americans a new awareness and sense of “worried urgency” about Asia, accompanied by images of the continent that were little more than “scratches on our minds.” Much the same now could probably be said about American public opinion toward the Arab world. When Isaacs wrote, the United States was already waging war in Korea and would later do so in Vietnam. Now we have just finished waging war in Iraq. Whatever one’s position on these wars, we think it worrisome that public attitudes toward them, whether supportive or critical, typically rest on such limited information. Is there some way of doing better—of glimpsing better informed and more considered public opinion concerning America’s role in the world?

INFORM PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT FOREIGN POLICY THE USES OF DELIBERATIVE POLLING

One approach is Deliberative Polling, which surveys a random sample of Americans both before and after they have had a chance to deliberate about certain issues. The sample is first interviewed, then invited to gather for a weekend. They are sent carefully balanced (and publicly available) briefing materials. On-site, they discuss the issues in randomly assigned small groups led by trained moderators and then pose questions developed in the small groups to panels of experts and political leaders. Parts of the discussions are broadcast on television, either live or in taped and edited form. At the end, the participants are asked again the same questions posed initially. The resulting distribution of opinion represents the conclusions the public would reach if people knew and thought more about the issues.

This proposal is not just theoretical. On January 10–12, 2003, we collabo-

rated with MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, the National Issues Forums, and others to conduct a Deliberative Poll on foreign policy issues as part of a project called *By the People: America in the World*. The participants in the 2003 poll in Philadelphia were a scientifically chosen random sample of 343 American citizens, aged 18 and older. They matched the country's adult citizenry in age, education, sex, region, ethnicity, race, occupation, employment status, military service, religious belief, religious attendance, and union membership. In microcosm, the sample was America. What did they conclude?

The Deliberative Poll on Iraq and International Security

Before coming to Philadelphia, the participants completed a 40-minute telephone interview about their views on fighting terrorism, controlling weapons

of mass destruction, protecting human rights, promoting democracy, providing foreign aid, solving global environmental problems, promoting international trade, and other topics. At the end of their two days of deliberations, they completed the same questionnaire with some additional questions.

By the end of the weekend, the participants were more likely to see Iraq as a threat but also far more insistent that the threat be dealt with only within the framework of the United Nations Security Council and on the basis of evidence from UN weapons inspectors. Eighty-seven percent ranked Iraq as a threat, as against 74 percent of the control group (a separate, contemporaneous survey of citizens who did not deliberate), and only 46 percent, compared with 57 percent of the control group, wanted to shift America's focus from Iraq to terrorism.

ED

By Henry E. Brady, James S. Fishkin, and Robert C. Luskin

More participants (77 percent) than control group members (73 percent) agreed that the United States should invade Iraq if the UN inspectors found evidence that convinced both the United States and the Security Council that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, but only 37 percent of the participants, as against 46 percent of the control group, thought that the United States should do so if the UN was not convinced—if evidence was found “that convinces the US but not the UN Security Council that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction.” And only 22 percent of the deliberators, compared with 31 percent of the control group, thought that the United States should invade Iraq “if there is no new evidence found by the inspectors but the US still has reasons to believe that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction.”

More generally, the participants grew warier of go-it-alone approaches, and not just with respect to Iraq. Support for acting alone to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction fell from 58 percent to 44 percent, for acting alone to stop terrorism from 67 percent to 52 percent. Support for working with the UN to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction rose from 85 percent to 92 percent, for working with the UN to stop mass killings from 82 percent to 93 percent.

The participants also changed their views regarding what the United States should do following a successful invasion of Iraq. They emerged more interested in rebuilding Iraq’s economy (96 percent versus 79 percent), trying to ensure Iraq’s friendliness to U.S. interests (86 percent versus 76 percent), and working with international organizations such as the United Nations in rebuilding the country (82 percent versus 61 percent).

Once the participants realized just how little is being spent on foreign aid, support for increasing foreign aid leapt from 20 percent to 53 percent, a majority.

Other Results on Global Affairs

Beyond Iraq and international security, the participants emerged more willing to take some responsibility for solving the world’s problems—ranging from military security to economic privation, the promotion of democracy, and the environment. The share disagreeing that “this country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other areas of the world” increased from 63 percent to 86 percent, while the share agreeing that “it is the job of the US as a global leader to protect the world from countries that are likely to use weapons of mass destruction” rose from 55 percent to 69 percent.

Similarly, the shares of participants preferring to deal with problems at home before dealing with world hunger or the global AIDS epidemic fell dramatically, from 53 percent to 29 percent in the first case and from 50 percent to 20 percent in the second. The share not supporting the goal of promoting democracy abroad declined from 38 percent to 23 percent. On environmental issues, the share wanting to solve environmental problems through international agreements increased from 70 percent to 87 percent, and the share willing to require higher gas mileage standards for vehicles increased from 65 percent to 81 percent.

Increases in Knowledge

These changes of opinion came about amid a great deal of observable learning. Before deliberation, many people thought the United States spends much more on foreign aid than it does. The share knowing roughly what proportion of the U.S. budget goes to foreign aid (less than 1 percent) more than tripled, from 19 percent to 64 percent. Participants showed the largest knowledge gain in this policy area, but in every area

they registered some increase in knowledge, and in several the increase was substantial. The shares knowing that President Bush opposes recent international agreements to control greenhouse gases, that the United States does not have a veto in the World Trade Organization, and that more than 30 of every 100 adults in the African countries with the highest rates of infection have AIDS or the AIDS virus increased from 37 percent to 53 percent, from 40 percent to 52 percent, and from 54 percent to 68 percent, respectively. Across the nine knowledge items in the survey, the share answering correctly increased an average of 12 percentage points.

Some sense of the effect of this learning may be gleaned from the change in opinion about foreign aid. Once the participants realized just how little is being spent on foreign aid, support for increasing foreign aid leapt from 20 percent to 53 percent, a majority. More generally, the participants’ knowledge and their opinions clearly changed dramatically because of their involvement in the Deliberative Poll. Some of this change probably preceded the deliberative weekend because the prospect of participating had already heightened participants’ interest and attention to foreign affairs. Our data show that they watched the news on TV, read newspapers, and discussed public affairs more often, paid more attention to TV news and newspaper articles about foreign affairs, and grew more interested in both foreign affairs and politics in the United States. Other changes undoubtedly came during the weekend itself, as they discussed foreign policy with their peers, asked questions of experts, and reflected on America’s place in the world.

Assessment

The National Issues Convention ended just as the Knight-Ridder poll was published, on January 12, but the Deliberative Polling results drew far less media attention. Why so little coverage? Shouldn’t informed public opinion count for more than uninformed public opinion?

One response might be that a single

Deliberative Poll cannot make the entire American population more knowledgeable about foreign policy. A Deliberative Poll involves only a few hundred Americans who are given a chance to learn, think, and deliberate. Why should the media take seriously the views of such a relatively small group? The answer is that they are a scientifically chosen random sample and their views therefore represent what the American people would think if they became similarly more knowledgeable about foreign policy. As noted, those who came to Philadelphia learned a great deal about foreign policy. They were clearly better informed after deliberating.

Another response might be that the outcome of the Deliberative Poll depended partly on the briefing materials and the experts to whom the participants were exposed. This is no doubt a central issue. Indeed, it is a fundamental issue in democracy—how can expertise be combined with democratic choice? We will not claim to have the final answer, but a well-designed Deliberative Poll does provide a sensible approach. The briefing materials for Philadelphia were prepared in consultation with experts taking many different perspectives, including former members of Democratic and Republican administrations and prominent academics. The experts who appeared in Philadelphia offered similarly varied perspectives. They included Lawrence Korb of the Council on Foreign Relations (a former assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration), Peter Brookes of the Heritage Foundation, William Niskanen of the Cato Institute, Anne-Marie Slaughter of Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton Lyman of the Aspen Institute, Kevin Martin of Peace Action, Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. For the final session, the Bush administration chose Richard Haass, director of policy planning at the State Department, as its own spokesperson. As his counterpart, *By the People* chose Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's national security adviser. A full range of opinions was represented. All the briefing materials and all the deliberative ses-

sions were open and available to the media.

These concerns call to mind those voiced by critics of scientific opinion polling during its infancy in the 1930s and 1940s. Some concerns led to such methodological improvements as the move from quota sampling to random sampling. Other concerns were unfounded. Deliberative Polling is similarly in its infancy and will probably require some modifications as we learn more about it. But the value of going beyond policy attitudes based only on "scratches on our minds" is great enough to justify investing in this method and taking it seriously. By giving substantial coverage to Deliberative Polls, the media could stimulate a broader debate about what information

and knowledge people need to make informed pronouncements about foreign policy.

Certainly a better informed public is worth listening to. On the PBS broadcast from the National Issues Convention, Brzezinski was asked, toward the end of an extended dialogue with the members of the Deliberative Poll, "whether foreign policy has become so specialized and so complex that it is impossible for average citizens to have informed opinions about foreign policy." "I probably would have said yes," he replied, "but my experience this morning makes me think otherwise. I was told—I hope that's true—that you are really a cross-section of the American public. If you are, you're damn good." ■

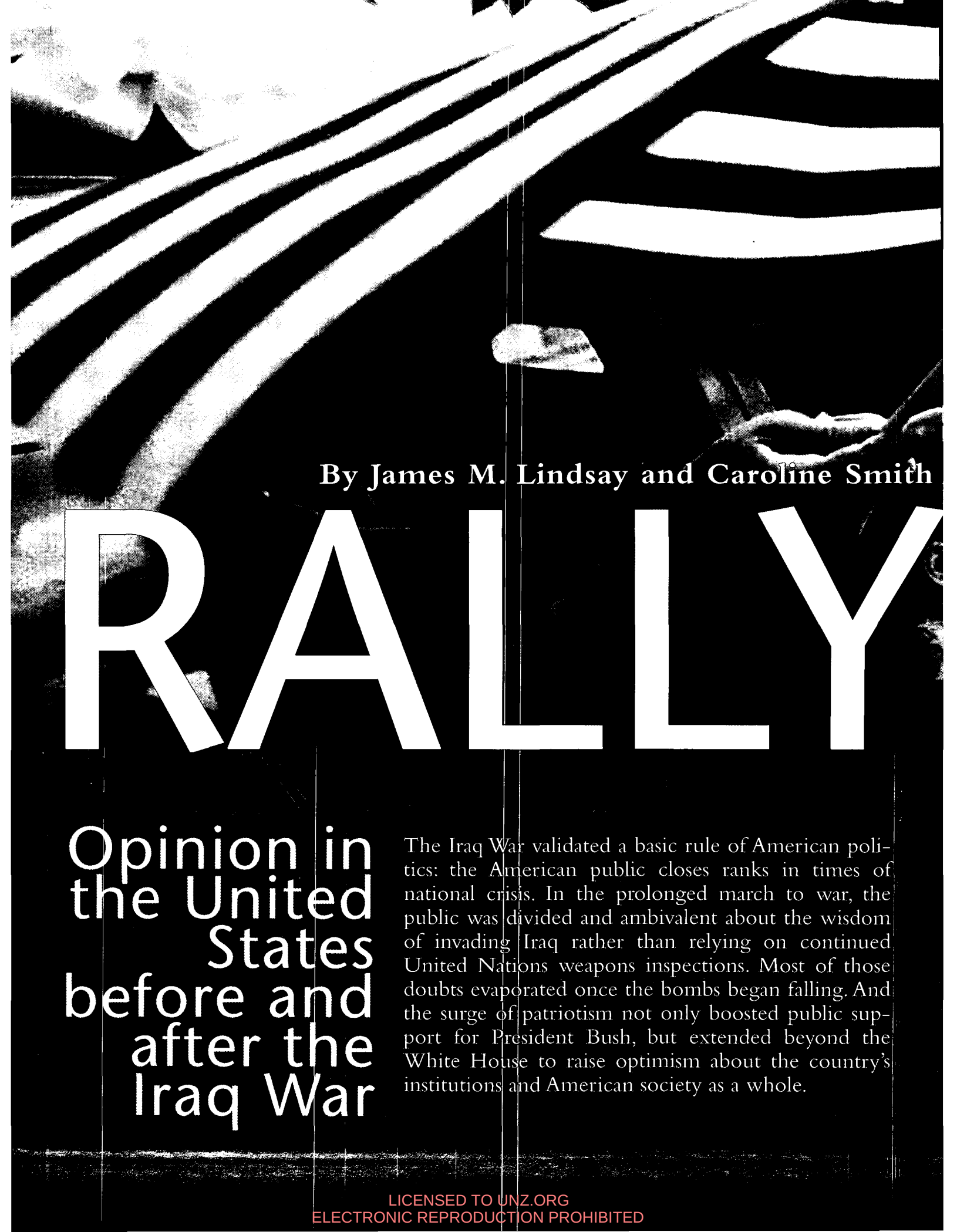
THE PROJECT

The Deliberative Poll was conducted with the Center for Deliberative Polling at the University of Texas, Austin. James S. Fishkin is the director and Robert C. Luskin the research director of the center.

The survey of Deliberative Poll participants was conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of California at Berkeley under the direction of Professor Henry Brady. Interviews with a control group of 612 respondents were completed in January 2003 by the Center for Policy Attitudes under the direction of Dr. Steven Kull. The briefing documents were provided by the National Issues Forums Institute and are available at the web site for *By the People* at <http://www.by-the-people.org>. *By the People* is an initiative of MacNeil-Lehrer Productions. Deliberative Polling is a trademark of James S. Fishkin. Fees from the trademark are used to support research.

The National Issues Convention was the lead-off event of *By the People: America in the World*, a project designed to broaden the national dialogue about international affairs. *By the People* receives funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Public Broadcasting Service.





By James M. Lindsay and Caroline Smith

RALLY

Opinion in
the United
States
before and
after the
Iraq War

The Iraq War validated a basic rule of American politics: the American public closes ranks in times of national crisis. In the prolonged march to war, the public was divided and ambivalent about the wisdom of invading Iraq rather than relying on continued United Nations weapons inspections. Most of those doubts evaporated once the bombs began falling. And the surge of patriotism not only boosted public support for President Bush, but extended beyond the White House to raise optimism about the country's institutions and American society as a whole.



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

The United States now confronts the question of how to win the peace in Iraq. From the early polls it is clear that Americans are not demanding the swift withdrawal of U.S. forces or expecting the rapid reconstruction of Iraq. President Bush, then, has considerable freedom to chart his own course in rebuilding Iraq. The polls—and historical experience—also show, however, that he may gain little lasting political benefit from the U.S. victory. Americans are already beginning to put aside his accomplishments overseas to evaluate what he has accomplished at home.

Public Opinion before the War

Iraq dominated the headlines throughout the fall of 2002 and into the winter of 2003. Public opinion on the wisdom of war, however, stabilized relatively early and slightly in favor of war. Gallup found that from August 2002 through early March 2003 the share of Americans favoring war hovered in a relatively narrow range between a low of 52 percent and a high of 59 percent. By contrast, the share of the public opposed to war fluctuated between 35 percent and 43 percent.

Not surprisingly, Republicans (75 percent in favor) backed war more strongly than did Democrats (only 40 percent). Younger Americans also tended to be more supportive of the war than older Americans. Six of out ten Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 favored war, as against fewer than five out of ten of those older than 65. The greater willingness of young Americans to endorse the use of military force is nothing new. Although Vietnam is remembered for its college-aged protesters, younger Americans on the whole tended to be more supportive of U.S. military action in southeast Asia than older Americans were.

The only three major demographic groups to show majority opposition to the war before its start were blacks (56 percent opposed in a February Gallup poll), people with post-graduate education (56 percent), and Democrats (55 percent). Although women are usually less supportive of the use of force than men, a slim majority of American women (51 percent) favored invading Iraq. Meanwhile, Hispanic Americans were slightly more supportive of the war (60 percent) than Americans as a whole—suggesting that arguments that the

rapid growth of the nation's Latino community is destined to shift U.S. foreign policy away from regions like the Middle East and toward Latin America are misplaced.

Although the American public leaned slightly in favor of war in 2002 and early 2003, the polls also showed that their support was ambivalent and conditional. Only about a third of the public accepted President Bush's contention that Iraq posed an imminent threat to U.S. security. When people were given the choice between going to war or giving UN weapons inspectors more time, a majority preferred more inspections. Support for the war also fell when people were given scenarios in which the UN refused to authorize the fighting or U.S. troops suffered heavy casualties.

Even many Americans who favored war were not demanding it. Gallup asked those who supported attacking Iraq whether they would be upset if President Bush decided not to go to war. Roughly half said no. The *Los Angeles Times* asked those who approved of the job Bush was doing as president why they supported him. Fewer than one in ten said they based that approval on his policy toward Iraq.

In sum, public opinion on the eve of war with Iraq was permissive—it was willing to follow the White House to war but not demanding war. About 30 percent of Americans were convinced that war was not only just but necessary. Another 30 percent firmly believed that a war could not be justified. The remaining 40 percent could imagine scenarios in which it made sense to go to war as well as scenarios in which it didn't. It was this "movable middle" that the Bush White House targeted in its public comments in the weeks leading up to war.

The Rally

The movable middle began to shift in the White House's favor even before the first bombs fell on Baghdad. In mid-March, as diplomacy began breaking down, public support for war crept higher. The last Gallup poll before the invasion began showed 64 percent in favor.

This shift surprised commentators who had put stock in earlier polls showing that Americans were less likely to support the war if the UN refused to authorize it. The surprise reflected a misreading of what Americans were saying rather than an inconsistency in what they were thinking. Most Americans did not interpret questions about UN authorization as meaning that war could be legitimate only if the UN authorized it. Rather, for them it was a proxy for whether the United States should go it alone in Iraq or act with others. In the few instances in which pollsters asked people whether they would support attacking Iraq if the UN Security Council refused to authorize war but President Bush nonetheless assembled a coalition of the willing in support of U.S. policy, a majority of Americans supported war.

Once Operation Iraqi Freedom began on March 19, support for the war surged to 72 percent in Gallup's polling and

remained there throughout the fighting. President Bush also benefited personally, gaining greater public approval; in the first days of fighting, Gallup recorded a 13-percentage-point rise. The increase, however, was much smaller than either the 35-percentage-point leap Bush enjoyed immediately after September 11—or the 24-point jump his father received at the start of the 1991 Gulf War.

The modest nature of Bush's Iraq rally reflected a deep partisan split over the wisdom of the war. More than nine out of ten Republicans supported the decision to go to war, as against only half of Democrats. This partisan divide stood in particu-

The modest nature of Bush's Iraq rally reflected a deep partisan split over the wisdom of the war. More than nine out of ten Republicans supported the decision to go to war, as against only half of Democrats.

larly sharp contrast to the experience of the Gulf War. Then, overwhelming majorities of members of both parties closed ranks behind the president despite being deeply split on the eve of war. The lower Democratic support for the Iraq War reflected disagreement over the wisdom of preemptively attacking another country, doubts about the sincerity of the administration's diplomatic efforts at the United Nations, and bitterness over how Bush and other Republicans had questioned Democrats' patriotism in the run-up to the war.

Reactions to the start of war also reflected a deep racial split. Whereas 78 percent of whites favored the decision to attack Iraq, only 29 percent of blacks did. The lukewarm black support for the Iraq War stands in marked contrast to blacks' views on the Persian Gulf War, when 59 percent of blacks backed the decision to go to war. Differences in question wording may explain some of the 30-percentage-point difference. A bigger factor would seem to be much greater skepticism about the need for the Iraq War and deep doubts about George W. Bush's interest in addressing problems that matter to blacks.

Although most commentary on public opinion focused on how Americans rallied around President Bush, the increase in patriotic and optimistic attitudes extended beyond the White House to the government and the country as a whole. As with the Persian Gulf and the Afghanistan wars, the invasion of Iraq also prompted the public to give higher marks to Congress and to express greater confidence in the country's future. A *New York Times*/CBS poll conducted in March found that the approval ratings for Congress jumped 7 percentage points, to 52 percent. Gallup found that the share of the public that was satisfied with the direction of the country surged from 36 percent to 60 percent. On the whole, Americans felt safer and more satisfied with the position of the United States in the world—and even felt slightly better about the environment. Rather than simply being about President Bush, the Iraq rally is better understood as a surge of patriotic support for the government and country as a whole.

Early Evaluations

In the weeks immediately after the capture of Baghdad and the end of major combat operations, Americans continued to

support the decision to invade. In late April, Gallup found that seven in ten Americans believed that President Bush had been right to order this attack. Support held even though nearly two out of every three people surveyed thought that the war was not yet over. Nor were Americans overly concerned about continued sporadic fighting or scenes of looting in Iraqi cities. More than eight in ten Americans said that they believed that things were going “very well” or “moderately well” with the end of major fighting in Iraq.

Not surprisingly, given the speed with which U.S. forces unseated Saddam Hussein, most Americans also were optimistic about the war’s consequences. In late April the share of the American public saying that the United States and its allies were winning the war on terrorism stood at 65 percent, up from 37 percent two weeks before the start of war. This optimism roughly equaled what Gallup found in the immediate aftermath of the Afghanistan war. The newfound confidence in America’s success in the war on terrorism was clearly boosted by the overall rally effect. When specifically asked whether the Iraq War had made Americans safer, the share of the public saying yes was somewhat lower at 58 percent.

The public was also untroubled by the failure, at least initially, of U.S. forces to uncover weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. At the start of fighting, Gallup found that only 38 percent of Americans said the war would be justified if the United States failed to find such weapons. In early April, by contrast, 58 percent said it would be. Moreover, the share of the American public that believed it was “very likely” that U.S. forces would eventually uncover Iraqi weapons of mass destruction fell from 59 percent in early April to 39 percent in late April.

Polls taken immediately after the war also indicated that the American public was not demanding a quick exit from Iraq. Gallup found that Americans rejected by a three-to-one margin the notion that the United States should set up a government in Iraq and leave as quickly as possible. Instead, 75 percent agreed that the United States should “take the time to make sure a democratic government is established in Iraq even if that results in U.S. troops staying in Iraq for a year or more.” The vast majority of Americans expected the U.S. occupation to last at least six months, with 28 percent believing it would last one to two years, and 21 percent longer than two years.

In the one clear departure with the Bush administration’s policy, a majority of Americans looked favorably on letting the United Nations take a lead role in Iraq’s reconstruction. Gallup found that 52 percent of Americans favored putting the United Nations in charge of overseeing the transition to a new government in Iraq. An even larger majority, 65 percent, favored putting the UN in charge of providing humanitarian assistance to Iraqi citizens. This preference probably owes less to a principled belief among Americans that the UN would be the most legitimate midwife to Iraqi democracy than to a pragmatic desire to share the costs and burdens of reconstruction with other countries.

The one open question is how long the public’s confident and optimistic view of the Iraq War will last. Much will depend on whether the Bush administration is as successful in

winning the peace in Iraq as it was in winning the war. Public support for U.S. military interventions in Lebanon in the early 1980s and Somalia in the early 1990s collapsed after deadly attacks on U.S. forces. Those two operations started with much lower public support, but the broader political lesson remains—the American public will not be willing to make an unlimited investment in Iraq. If Iraq begins to look like Lebanon or Somalia, the public pressure to withdraw U.S. troops could quickly become intense. Many Democrats would clearly be delighted to argue that President Bush has committed a foreign policy blunder of historic proportions.

More generally, the public’s final evaluation of the wisdom of the Iraq War could be years in coming. At the end of the Persian Gulf War, 72 percent of Americans thought that the liberation of Kuwait had been worth the loss of lives and other costs. Ten years later, however, with Saddam Hussein still in charge in Baghdad, only 51 percent of Americans believed the war had been worth it.

Looking Ahead

Although the Iraq War boosted President Bush’s public approval ratings, history suggests that he will not be able to translate battlefield victory into a greater say over domestic policy. His father failed to do so after the 1991 Gulf War—perhaps because he lacked a clear domestic agenda to enact. Nonetheless, the younger Bush experienced the same difficulties after September 11 and the Afghanistan war. Democrats blocked his economic stimulus plan, rejected his proposal to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and stonewalled his judicial nominees even though U.S. forces had orchestrated the rout of the Taliban. Indeed, even as bombs were falling on Iraq, Bush rediscovered that a Congress that is deferential abroad can be defiant at home. On the second day of the war, the Republican-controlled Senate voted once again to kill his proposal to drill for oil in the Arctic. It later voted to cut his \$726 billion tax cut in half.

Nor does an impressive victory in Iraq guarantee President Bush’s reelection in 2004, as he knows all too well from family history. His father’s public approval ratings were in the 80s at the end of the Persian Gulf War—or about 15 points higher than his own at the end of the Iraq War—yet the older Bush garnered only 38 percent of the vote in the 1992 election. Some poll results suggest that the younger Bush may be vulnerable to a repeat of history. In late April, 54 percent of Americans told Gallup that Bush was not paying enough attention to the economy. By a margin of 47 percent to 42 percent, Americans also said that his proposed tax cuts were a bad idea. And on the question of whether Bush was “in touch or out of touch with the problems ordinary Americans face in their daily lives,” the public split down the middle. Exactly 50 percent said in touch, while 48 percent said out of touch.

President Bush looks to be keenly aware of his potential vulnerabilities. His response to victory in Iraq was to hit the road to make the case for his economic policy proposals. And that illustrates another basic law of American political life: when wars end, domestic politics quickly reverts to normal. ■

Arab

PUBLIC OPINION

By Shibley Telhami

Postwar Prospects for

survey that I conducted in six Arab countries in late February and early March found an unprecedented tide of public opinion running against the United States as American troops massed outside Iraq. Only 4 percent of respondents in Saudi Arabia, 6 percent in Jordan and Morocco, 10 percent in the United Arab Emirates, and 13 percent in Egypt expressed a favorable view of the United States. Even in Lebanon, where opinion was more positive, only 32 percent of respondents had a favorable view (see table 1). And when respondents were asked, in an open question, to name the world leader they most admired, the name mentioned most often was French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, who confronted the Bush administration directly to try to stop the U.S. war effort.

Shibley Telhami, a nonresident senior fellow in the Brookings Foreign Policy Studies program, is Amwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland. This project is funded in part by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. For details on the survey, see <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/SADAT/mesurvey.htm>.



Changing Prewar Views

API/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

SUMMER 2003

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Table 1.
What Is Your Attitude toward the United States?
(Percent)

COUNTRY	FAVORABLE			UNFAVORABLE			NOT FAMILIAR
	OVERALL	VERY	SOMEWHAT	OVERALL	VERY	SOMEWHAT	
Lebanon	32	10	22	59	40	19	6
Egypt	13	2	10	79	58	20	4
UAE	10	2	8	86	31	55	2
Morocco	6	1	4	91	67	24	3
Jordan	6	1	5	80	63	17	10
Saudi Arabia	4	—	4	95	68	27	1

and 46 percent, respectively—based their attitudes on U.S. policy.

Although polling conducted in the region by Zogby International over the past several years has consistently found unfavorable views of the United States, these findings are the most negative that I've seen. And at the heart of Arab attitudes are resentment of U.S. policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and deep mistrust of American's intentions in Iraq. Huge majorities expressed suspicions about what motivates U.S. policy toward Iraq. The number one answer they give is oil, with more than 80 percent agreeing that oil is an extremely important motivating factor for the United States. The number two answer—gaining assent from more than 70 percent of respondents—is U.S. support for Israel. The answers given least frequently are democracy, economic development, or peace.

The opposition to war with Iraq was also driven by pessimism about its outcome. Asked what they thought would be the result of the U.S.-Iraq war, large majorities in all six countries responded that they thought the war would bring in its wake less democracy (table 3), less peace (table 4), and more terrorism (table 5). Just 2 percent of Moroccans, 3 percent of Saudis, and 6 percent of Egyptians believed that the Middle East would be more democratic after the war. More than two-thirds of respondents believed that the Middle East would be less democratic. And more than 80 percent believed that the war would generate more terrorism. Overwhelming majorities also believed that war with Iraq would worsen prospects for settling the Arab-Israeli dispute (table 6).

Can the United States Overcome the Negative Views?

Though it is far too early for any long-term assessment of what the U.S.-Iraq war will ultimately mean for the Middle East, the views expressed by the Arabs polled underline how urgent it is for U.S. policymakers to try to counter the negative views of America in the region. Although the shock



Most of the 3,020 respondents polled agreed that their negative view of the United States was based on American policy in the Middle East, not on their values as Arabs (see table 2). In four countries—Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Lebanon, and Jordan—large majorities of respondents (from 58 percent to 67 percent) explained their unfavorable attitudes toward the United States as being based on American policy in the Middle East. In the UAE and Egypt almost a majority—47 percent

of the war has prompted some reflection and some reassessment among Arabs—particularly, it has forced a reluctant recognition of the brutality of the regime of Saddam Hussein—the Arab view of the United States today remains largely the same as that expressed in the polls.

Arabs believe to this day that the United States is in Iraq for oil. The regional media coverage of the war focused heavily on the fact that much of the postwar looting happened in hospitals

Table 2.
On What Are Your Attitudes toward the United States Based?
(Percent)

COUNTRY	BASED ON MY VALUES	BASED ON U.S. POLICY	NOT SURE
Saudi Arabia	33	67	0
Morocco	37	59	4
Lebanon	29	58	14
Jordan	36	58	6
UAE	48	47	5
Egypt	43	46	11

Table 3.
Will the U.S.-Iraq War Mean More Democracy or Less Democracy in the Middle East?
(Percent)

COUNTRY	MORE DEMOCRACY	LESS DEMOCRACY	NEITHER	NOT SURE
UAE	8	59	25	8
Jordan	7	58	26	9
Lebanon	7	73	16	4
Egypt	6	63	18	13
Saudi Arabia	3	95	2	0
Morocco	2	66	21	11

Table 4.
Will the U.S.-Iraq War Mean More Peace or Less Peace in the Middle East?
(Percent)

COUNTRY	MORE PEACE	LESS PEACE	NEITHER	NOT SURE
Lebanon	9	79	10	3
Egypt	5	79	13	2
Saudi Arabia	5	91	3	0
Jordan	4	60	30	7
UAE	3	76	19	2
Morocco	1	89	8	2

Table 5.
Will the U.S.-Iraq War Mean More Terrorism or Less Terrorism in the Middle East?
(Percent)

COUNTRY	MORE TERRORISM	LESS TERRORISM	NEITHER	NOT SURE
Saudi Arabia	96	2	1	0
Morocco	87	1	8	4
Lebanon	81	9	7	4
Jordan	78	3	11	8
Egypt	75	7	15	3
UAE	74	7	17	3

Table 6.
Will the U.S.-Iraq War Mean Better Prospects or Worse Prospects for a Settlement of the Arab-Israeli Dispute?
(Percent)

COUNTRY	BETTER PROSPECTS	WORSE PROSPECTS	NEITHER	NOT SURE
Egypt	16	67	7	10
Jordan	6	79	10	6
Lebanon	5	82	9	5
UAE	4	58	31	8
Morocco	1	85	5	8
Saudi Arabia	1	97	1	0

and museums, left unprotected by U.S. forces, and not in the oil installations and oil ministries, which were heavily guarded by troops. Countering the strong negative impression left by such media coverage will not be easy. Repeated statements by leaders in Washington that the United States has no intention of leaving American forces in Iraq in the long term should begin to alleviate Arab concerns that U.S. forces plan to guard the oil-fields permanently, but policymakers face a dilemma. On the one hand, the United States does not want to withdraw from Iraq prematurely and leave anarchy behind. On the other hand, the United States does not want to appear to be staying in Iraq as an imperial power to protect oil interests. Given the prevailing mistrust and suspicion, the only solution to the dilemma seems to be bringing in other parties, particularly multicultural organizations, in a credible and meaningful way, to legitimize the continued U.S. presence in Iraq until a new, stable, and representative government emerges.

Arab suspicions that the war will decrease rather than increase democracy are well founded—and for several reasons. First, when, in the weeks leading up to the war, the U.S. government asked for help from friendly Arab governments whose people bitterly opposed the war, those governments' only recourse was to go against the popular will by using their security services to be more repressive. Throughout the war period, many Arabs personally experienced more repression—and less democracy—and probably will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. And, second, the past 35 years have destroyed Iraq's middle class and nearly all Iraqi civil institutions and organizations. The primary organizational capacity that remains is religious, as the million Shia marchers to Karbala in the aftermath of the war demonstrated. Whenever the first Iraqi election takes place, whether this year or next, the leaders who are best able to mobilize large numbers of voters are the clergy. If by democracy we mean a truly free electoral democracy, what are the chances that any free election is going to have an outcome that Washington will find acceptable in the foreseeable future? In addition, it was clear by the end of the first month after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime that the United States had lost its one chance at a favorable first impression with the Iraqi people, whose hate for Saddam has not translated into love for America, given the anarchy and humanitarian disaster that followed the war.

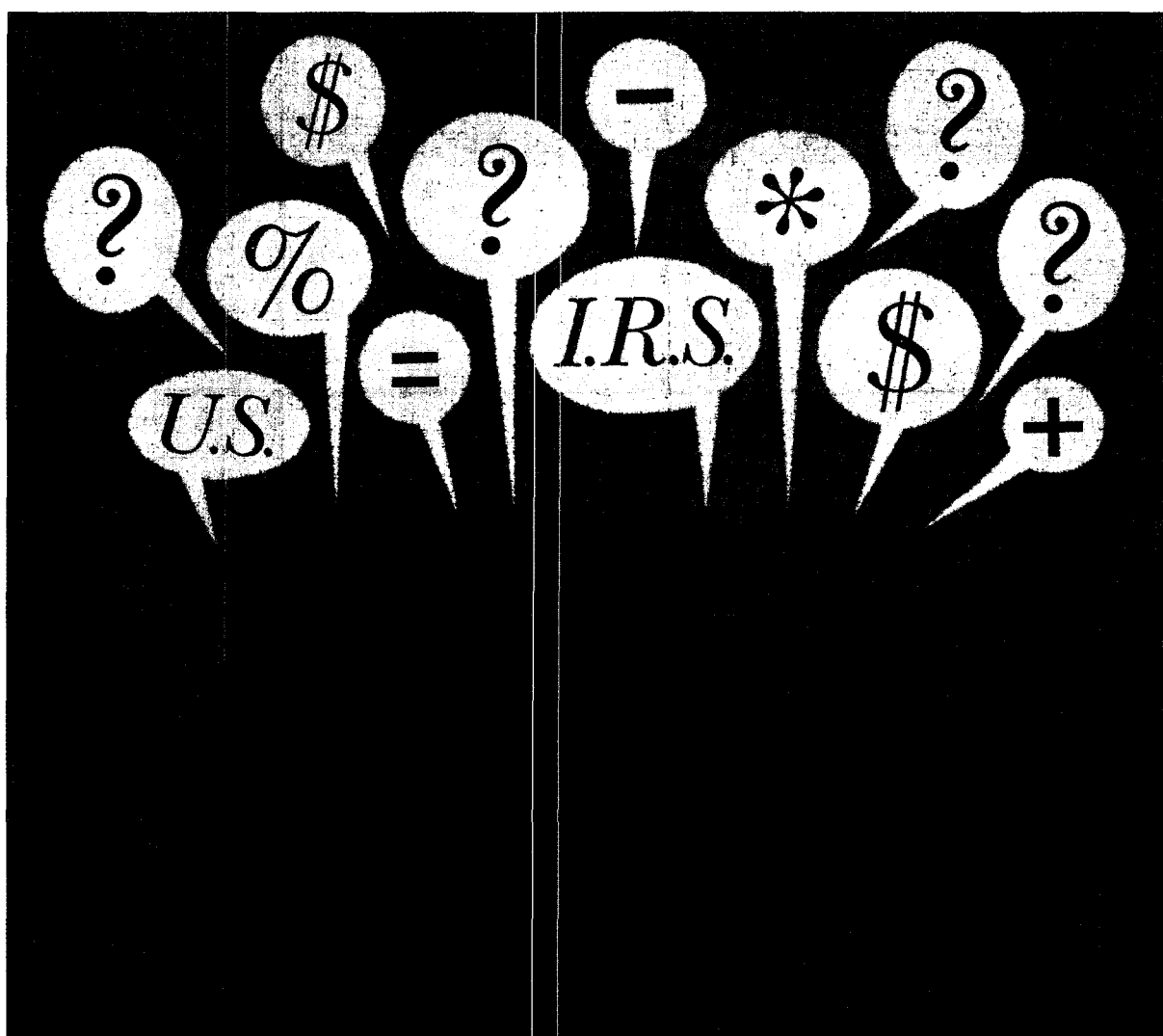
Finally, there is the issue of Arab-Israeli peace, which remains a prism through which the Arab world sees America. U.S. policymakers must do everything possible to revive credible Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that keep alive the hope for peace. Quite apart from the moral need to alleviate hardship and help the Israelis and Palestinians who have suffered so long from regional violence, negotiations would also serve the practical need to counter the belief of the overwhelming majority of the Arabs polled that the U.S.-Iraq war makes the prospect of an Arab-Israeli settlement less rather than more likely. Bush administration efforts in the coming months to put Israelis and Palestinians on the road to peace would be the single most important signal it could send to persuade the Arab people to begin reassessing their views of the United States. ■

TAX

By Robert J. Blendon,
Stephen R. Pelletier,
Marcus D. Rosenbaum,
and Mollyann Brodie

UNCERTAINTY

A Divided America's Unformed View of the Federal Tax System



The NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School survey team includes Robert J. Blendon, of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government; Stephen R. Pelletier, Elizabeth Raleigh, and John Benson, of Harvard's School of Public Health; Mollyann Brodie, Drew E. Altman, and Rebecca Levin, of the Kaiser Family Foundation; Marcus D. Rosenbaum, of National Public Radio; and Melissa J. Herrmann, of International Communications Research.

With tax cuts as the centerpiece of the Bush administration's domestic policy agenda, the president himself hit the road this spring to try to gin up public support. But as Congress and the White House carried the issue deep into the arcana of hundreds of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money, tax policy never seemed to resonate beyond the Beltway. Why? What do Americans really think about taxes and tax policy?

In February and March of 2003, National Public Radio, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government set out to explore that question. Although many polling organizations have canvassed on this subject, the NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll was designed to dig deeper—to look not only at Americans' opinions about tax issues but also at why they held the opinions they did and how much they understood about the federal tax system.

Changing the Tax System

As they do on so many public policy issues, Americans divide pretty much down the middle on their basic beliefs about the federal tax system. About half (52 percent) say there is so much wrong with the federal tax system that Congress should completely overhaul it, while 44 percent say the system works pretty well and needs only minor changes to make it work better.

Likewise, the public divides fairly evenly on whether federal income taxes are too high and whether the tax system is fair. About half (51 percent) say they pay too much in federal income taxes, 43 percent say they pay about the right amount, and 3 percent say they pay too little. On the fairness issue, once again about half (51 percent) say the federal tax system is fair, while about half (48 percent) say it is unfair. Interestingly, the share of Americans saying federal income taxes are too high has declined in recent years, as has the share saying that taxes are unfair (see figures 1 and 2).

The findings on the tax burden and the fairness issues indicate that Americans may be less inclined to support tax cuts or fundamental changes in the tax system than they have been in

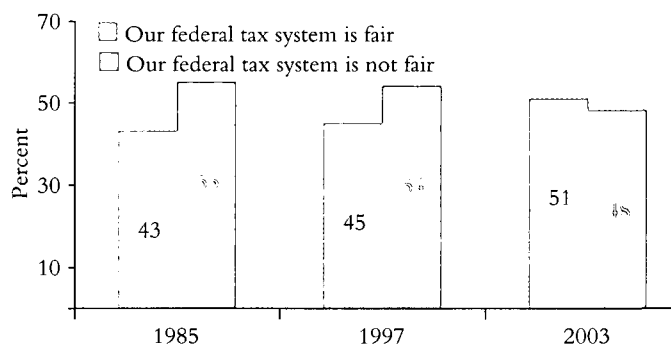
recent years because they are relatively more content today with the way things are. But clearly there is discontent, and the poll probes what Americans want to change at this time.

Reforming the Federal Tax System

The NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School team asked about two specific tax cut proposals—eliminating the tax on dividends and eliminating the estate tax. It also asked about two proposals that would completely overhaul the current federal tax system—replacing the current graduated income tax with a flat-rate tax or with a consumption tax (described as “something like a national sales tax”). One goal was to find out whether people had formed an opinion on these issues, so initial questions asked whether the respondent favored or opposed something or hadn't heard enough about it to have an opinion. This gave people an “honorable” way to say “don't know.” (See table 1.) Some questions also explored what respondents knew about a subject and whether their knowledge was related to their opinions.

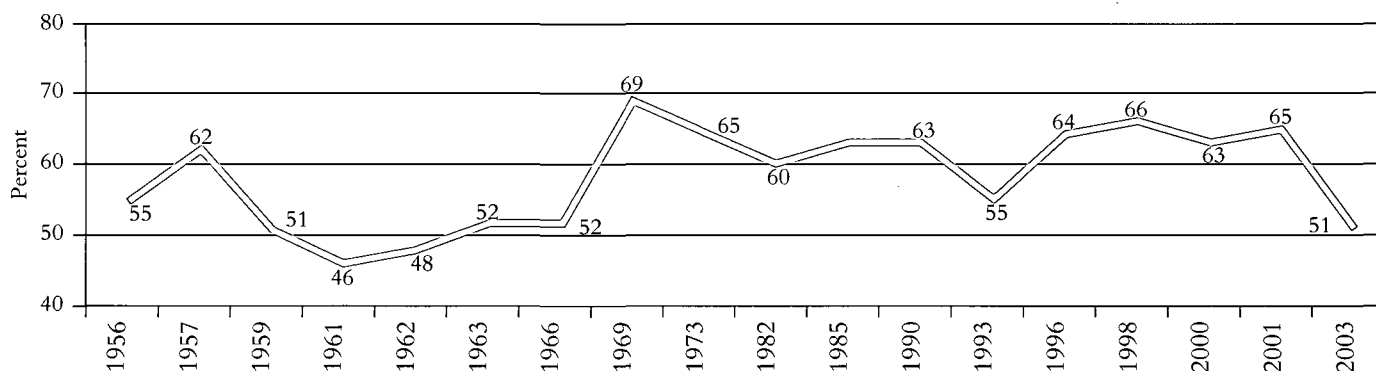
Most Americans (61 percent) had never heard of the proposal to eliminate the tax on dividends, and among the 38 percent who had, more than a quarter (28 percent) said they didn't know enough about it to have an opinion. Given arguments in favor of and opposed to the dividends tax cut, the

Figure 2.
Americans' Attitudes about Tax Fairness, 1985–2003



Source: Time/CNN/Yankelovich 1985, 1997; NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Survey of Americans' Views on Taxes, 2003

Figure 1.
Share of Americans Who Believe That Taxes Are Too High, 1956–2003



Source: Gallup Organization (1956–2001), NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Survey of Americans' Views on Taxes, 2003

Table 1.
The Public's Reaction to Changing the Tax System

	FAVOR	OPPOSE	DON'T KNOW
Eliminating estate tax	57%	15%	28%
Eliminating dividend tax			
Question as posed initially ¹	15	12	72
Question elaborated ²	43	42	14
Changing to a flat-rate tax	36	32	31
Changing to a consumption-based tax ³	24	38	38
President Bush's tax cuts			
Speeding up the tax cuts	31	21	48
Making them permanent	23	17	60

NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Survey of Americans' Views of Taxes, 2003

1. Respondents were not given arguments for and against the dividend tax. The question was asked only of those who said they had heard of the proposal to eliminate the dividend tax (38 percent). Favor and Oppose represent percentage of total population. Don't know includes the 61 percent who had not heard of the proposal to eliminate the tax.

2. Respondents were given arguments for and against the dividend tax.

3. Respondents were asked whether a national sales tax would be a good idea (favor) or a bad idea (oppose).

Table 2.
Americans' Knowledge of Taxes, by Household Income

KNOWLEDGE	HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
	< \$150K	TOP 5% \$150K+
Knowledge scale of taxes		
Low knowledge about taxes	49% ^a	14%
Medium knowledge about taxes	35	33
High knowledge about taxes	16 ^a	53
Questions factored into the scale include:		
In the past two years, has there been a federal income tax cut?		
Has been	49 ^a	70
Has not been	34 ^a	24
Don't know enough to say	17 ^a	7
Generally speaking, how does the federal income tax work?		
People with higher incomes are taxed at a higher percentage	59 ^a	90
Everyone pays the same percentage	12 ^a	3
Don't know enough to say	29 ^a	7
Do you think that the amount deducted from your paycheck for Social Security and Medicare is part of the federal income tax?		
No, it is not part of the federal income tax	43 ^a	64
Yes, it is part of the federal income tax	30	25
Don't know enough to say	27 ^a	9
Which group pays the highest share of their income in total federal taxes?		
High-income people	23 ^a	48
Middle-income people	52 ^a	41
Low-income people	12 ^a	7
Don't know enough to say	13 ^a	3

NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Survey of Americans' Views of Taxes, 2003

a. Statistically different from the top 5% income level (\$150K+)

country once again split down the middle, with 43 percent favoring eliminating the tax and 42 percent opposed (14 percent volunteered they didn't know whether they favored or opposed eliminating the tax).

On the estate tax issue, although there also was a high share of "don't knows" (28 percent), a majority (57 percent) initially said they supported eliminating it. When asked why, 92 percent agreed that the money was already taxed once and shouldn't be taxed again, 74 percent agreed that the tax might force the sale of small businesses and family farms, and 69 percent agreed that "it might affect [them] someday."

Even among the 33 percent who knew that the estate tax affects only a few families, a majority supported eliminating the tax. But that support may not be as strong as it seems at first glance. While only 15 percent of the public said they opposed eliminating the estate tax in the initial question, another 26 percent said they would want to keep the estate tax only on estates of \$1 million or more. Taken together, that means that 41 percent supported the current law. A majority (52 percent) wanted to keep an estate tax on estates of \$5 million or more. Only 26 percent supported eliminating the tax on estates worth more than \$25 million.

Fewer than two out of five (36 percent) supported replacing the current graduated income tax system with a flat-rate one, and only about a quarter (24 percent) thought it a good idea to replace the income tax with a consumption tax. Again, many people said they don't know enough about either issue to have an opinion—31 percent for the flat-rate tax and 38 percent for the consumption tax.

Many of these proposals to overhaul the tax system are seen as ways to simplify it, and, indeed, the vast majority of Americans (87 percent) do find the federal tax system complex. When asked to choose reasons for the complexity, the most common choice was that "there are so many different kinds of deductions and tax credits, and so many rules about how to take them." Americans do not, however, disapprove of deductions. Solid majorities said it is fair to give tax breaks to families that have more dependent children (76 percent), have more medical expenses (71 percent), give more to charity (62 percent), and have a home mortgage (55 percent). Moreover, on a theoretical level, seven out of ten Americans (72 percent) said that the tax system should be used to encourage things like financing a home, giving to charities, and buying health insurance. Only 23 percent said they thought the tax system should be used solely to raise revenue.

Bush Tax Cuts

The split in public attitudes about the tax system is reflected in public views of the Bush administration's proposals to accelerate and to make permanent the 2001 tax cuts. About one-third (31 percent) favored, and 21 percent opposed, speeding up the 2001 tax cuts so they would go into effect soon. As for making the 2001 tax cuts permanent, 23 percent supported it, while 17 percent opposed it. More significant, however, is the number of people who said they did not know enough about these issues to have an opinion: 48 percent had no opinion about

speeding up the tax cuts, and 60 percent had no opinion about making the 2001 tax cuts permanent.

Stimulating the Economy

At the time of the survey, Americans were concerned with the faltering economy and the need to stimulate economic growth. President Bush has advocated his tax cuts as a way to stimulate the sluggish economy. For their part, Democrats have pushed other tax cuts as economic stimulants.

The NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll asked respondents whether four potential tax cuts would stimulate the economy. Fifty-four percent believed that an across-the-board cut in income taxes would stimulate the economy, 28 percent did not, and 18 percent did not know enough to say. But only a minority of Americans believed that a \$300 per taxpayer rebate (43 percent), a dividend tax cut (35 percent), or a temporary cut in payroll taxes (24 percent) would stimulate the economy.

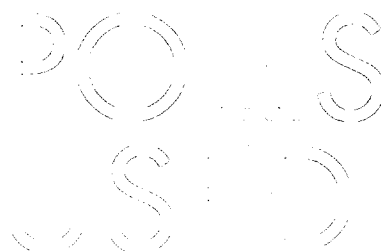
The differences between the parties were stark. Republicans were more likely than Democrats (70 percent as against 44 percent) to say an across-the-board tax cut would stimulate the economy. Similar differences existed on whether eliminating taxes on dividends (50 percent as against 25 percent) and a tax rebate of \$300 per person (50 percent as against 38 percent) would stimulate the economy.

Interestingly, only 19 percent of respondents said that if they were given a tax rebate of \$300, or up to \$1,200 per family, they would spend it—the action that many believe would provide a short-term economic stimulus. Significantly more said they would save or invest it (41 percent) or use it to pay back money they already owed (40 percent).

Knowledge of the Tax System

An important caveat is in order, however, when dealing with any of these opinions about the tax system. As Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter's 1996 book, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*, has shown, people who are knowledgeable about an issue are more capable of making informed political choices. But tax policy is not one of those issues about which Americans are informed. The NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School survey reveals that many Americans are unfamiliar with basic tax policy debate and do not understand essential principles of the federal tax system (table 2). For example, fully half of the public (50 percent) did not know that federal income taxes had been cut over the past two years; fewer than half (43 percent) knew that Social Security and Medicare taxes are not part of the federal income tax; and nearly two-thirds (63 percent) thought that low- or middle-income people pay the highest share of their income in federal taxes (only 25 percent knew that high-income people do).

Based on a series of knowledge questions, the NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll found that the highest-income Americans (those earning \$150,000 or more a year, putting them in the top 5 percent of income nationwide) were the most knowledgeable about the tax system. More than half of



he results reported here are drawn mainly from a poll conducted by the NPR/Kaiser Family Foundation/Kennedy School of Government survey project conducted February 5–March 17, 2003.

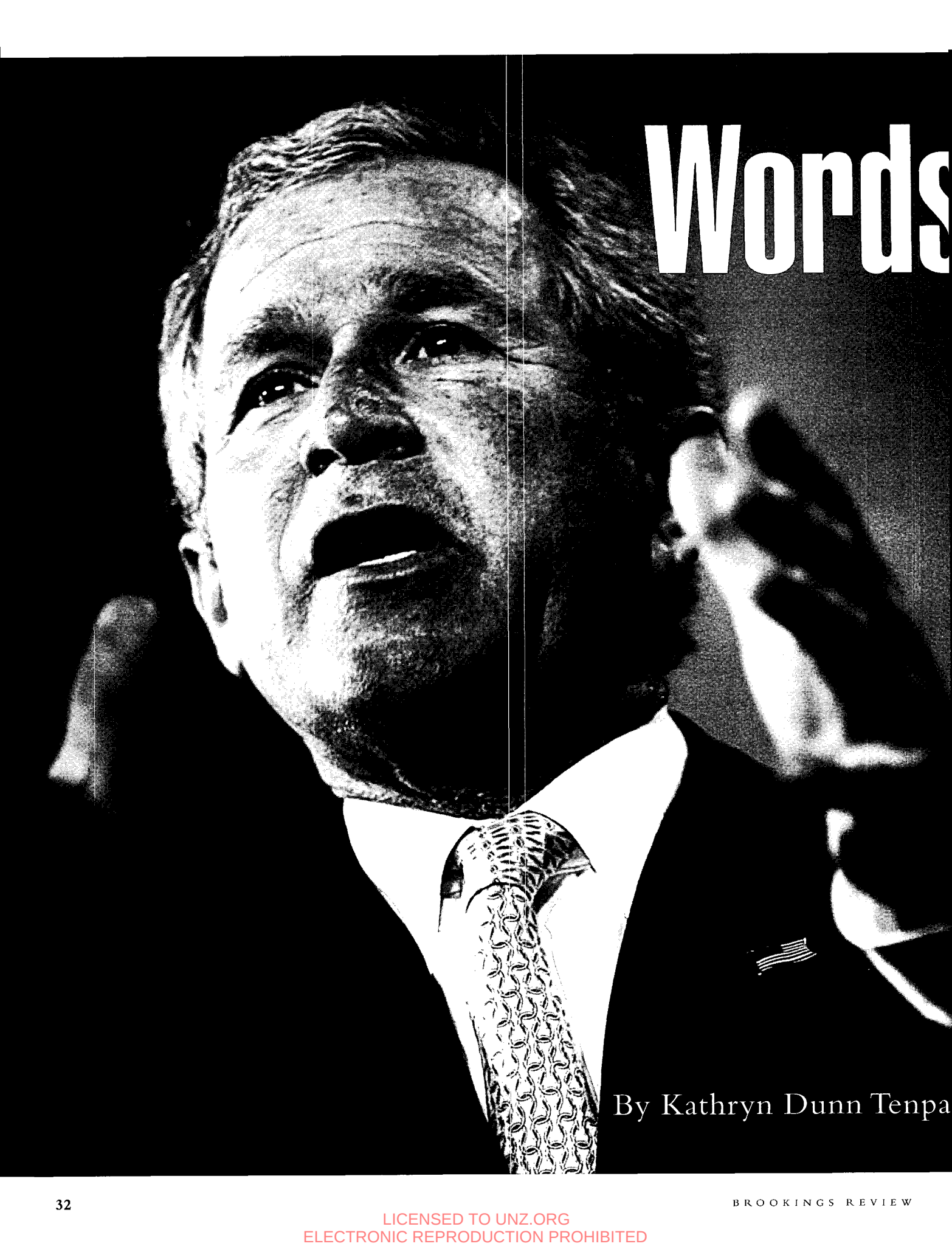
The poll surveyed 1,339 adults nationwide and oversampled Americans with annual incomes of \$150,000 or more. The survey design allowed respondents the option of saying that they did not know enough about the questions to have an opinion. This approach encourages those who have not come to a judgment or do not consider themselves knowledgeable to say so and thus leads to higher “don’t know” responses than generally found in other polls.

Other data come from polls by *Time*/Yankelovich Skelly and White (1985), *Time*/CNN/Yankelovich Clancy and Shulman (1997), the Gallup Organization (1956–2003), ABC News/*Washington Post* (March 2003).

these high-income Americans (53 percent) had high levels of knowledge about the tax system, while only 16 percent of the rest of the public did.

This situation is not unique. Earlier studies, both our own and those of other analysts, have shown that Americans do not have a good foundation of knowledge about how the economy operates. This situation has huge implications for the governance of the nation, as most of the public is at a disadvantage in debates about the future of tax policy. The debate may be weighted toward those at the top of the income scale, who pay the most taxes, because they have the most knowledge. Those who benefit most from the progressive nature of the federal tax system may not be able to participate fully in the debate because they know too little about how the system works. To have a broader debate over tax policy in the future, the nation's politicians, schools, colleges, and the media will need to do a better job of informing all Americans about the tax system that so affects their lives.

In the meantime, if the economy continues to slump during the 2004 election campaign, Americans will no doubt want to hear how the candidates plan to get it moving again, and tax policy is likely to play a role in that debate. The findings presented here show that on this issue, as on so many others, Americans are fairly evenly divided. The findings also indicate that Americans' general lack of knowledge about the tax system will give politicians and interest groups considerable leeway in framing their arguments. Both sides will need to take care not to let their opponents set the agenda. ■



Words

By Kathryn Dunn Tenpa

VS. Deeds

President George W. Bush and POLLING

President George W. Bush pledged repeatedly throughout his presidential campaign that his administration would have no use for polls and focus groups: “I really don’t care what polls and focus groups say. What I care about is doing what I think is right.” Shackled by that promise, President Bush and his staff have shrouded his polling apparatus, minimizing the relevance of polls and denying their impact. But public records available from the Federal Election Commission, documents from presidential libraries, and interviews with key players paint a fairly clear picture of the Bush polling operation. The picture, which turns out to be a familiar one, calls into question the administration’s purported “anti-polling” ethos and shows an administration closely in keeping with historical precedent.

President Bush in Historical Context

Every president since Richard Nixon has hired professional pollsters to take, periodically, the pulse of the electorate. Earlier presidents clearly had relationships with pollsters, who obligingly tacked questions onto their existing polls for the benefit of the administration. But polling was not under White House control. Nixon’s use of pollsters marked a turning point in the history of presidential polling because it signaled the birth of White House–commissioned polls. No longer tethered to the timetables and agendas of pollsters like Lou Harris and George

Gallup, presidents began to direct both the timing and the substance of their polls. Nor were polls limited to the campaign season; presidents and their staff could test the popularity of various programs and policy initiatives on their own schedule. Scholars, noting that the transfer of campaign tactics to governing was blurring the distinction between the two, began describing the result as the “permanent campaign.”

Rapid advances in technology played a big part in the new ways presidents used polling. By the time Nixon took office, computers, though costly, had become sophisticated enough to process vast quantities of data. Not only were telephones ubiquitous enough to make their use in polling methodologically feasible, but the advent of random digit dialing increased the efficiency and validity of telephone polling. In short, the “science” of polling became more mature, enabling presidents not only to learn about their past performance but to gain “prospective” intelligence. Today, testing key phrases in a speech or catchphrases designed to sell a policy or program has become so commonplace that presidential speeches and public pronouncements endure many rounds of focus group testing before being judged ready for primetime. Innovative techniques like the mall intercept (interviewing shoppers at a mall storefront), tracking polls, overnight polling, dial meters, and focus groups are part of any professional pollster’s repertoire. And new Internet focus groups are being used, by the Bush pollsters among others, as a more timely, less expensive way to conduct focus groups. Though still in its nascent stages, Internet polling is thought to be the next generation of survey research, significantly lowering costs while increasing the speed with which polls can be conducted.

The names of many past presidential pollsters are familiar, if not exactly household names. Robert Teeter did polling for Presidents Nixon, Ford, and George H.W. Bush; Patrick Caddell for President Carter; Richard Wirthlin for President Reagan; and Stanley Greenberg (1993–94) and Mark Penn (1995–2000) for President Clinton. Most began as pollsters for the campaign and were “promoted” to presidential pollsters, taking on a higher profile in the process. Indeed, the unprecedented visibility and perceived influence of Clinton’s pollsters created much advance interest in President George W. Bush’s prospective pollsters. But Bush’s determination to be the “anti-Clinton” and his repeated campaign promises to give polls and focus groups no role in his administration led him to relegate his pollsters to near anonymity. Still, their low profile, particularly compared with that of Clinton’s pollsters, has not kept them from performing essential polling for the White House.

By the Numbers

The Republican and Democratic National Committees subsidize presidential political expenses such as polling and political travel and routinely report those expenses to the Federal Election Commission. Table 1 sets out polling expenditures only for designated presidential pollsters during the first two years of the Reagan, Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II administrations. The pollsters for the second Bush administration come in well behind those of Presidents Reagan and Clinton and only

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slightly ahead of the first Bush administration. Though the parties spent extraordinary amounts on both Reagan and Clinton, Reagan's administration was popularly perceived as being driven by deeply rooted philosophical principles while Clinton's was seen as merely pandering—suggesting that polling does not always taint a president's reputation.

When the party of the president is in power, the national committee becomes a veritable White House annex staffed with loyalists eager to secure the president's reelection. Toward that end, no amount of polling is too much, particularly when the polling can also inform broader party strategy and statewide campaigns. A look at Republican National Committee spending on polling more generally (not just designated presidential pollsters) reveals that it spent roughly \$3.1 million during the first two years of the current Bush administration. And even that figure understates the polling available to the White House because it does not include polling conducted on behalf of the National Republican Senatorial Committee and the National Republican Congressional Committee, which totals some \$6.5 million—more than double what the RNC spent on polling. Though neither of those organizations is responsible for subsidizing White House polling, Bush's presidential pollsters, Jan van Lohuizen (Voter/Consumer Research) and Fred Steeper (Market Strategies), have done work for these committees totaling more than \$800,000—a sum that if added to presidential polling would bump up the Bush total to \$2.5 million, more than \$1 million more than Bush I. And Karl Rove's extraordinary sway makes it unlikely that any request by him for statewide polls that might be of interest to the president would be denied either by the president's pollsters or by any pollsters doing work for the RNC. In addition, the RNC spent \$2.7 million on "political consulting." And although the FEC reports do not detail the various projects, the reports include work by former White House adviser Karen Hughes and a broad range of Republican consulting firms.

As interesting as the total amount of RNC spending on polling is its timing (figure 1). Rather than being more or less consistent monthly, spending peaks in ways that seem hard to explain. Though noteworthy events—the September 11

attacks and the midterm elections—may account for two of the peaks, Matthew Dowd, senior adviser at the RNC, has indicated that events do not necessarily drive polling. And while pollsters may be interested in gauging the impact of unexpected events or new developments, their billing is not systematic in a way that could support the event-driven explanation. Nevertheless, a statistical regression analysis reveals a general trend upward, roughly an average increase of \$4,000 a month, suggesting that, over time, there are forces driving the RNC to spend more money on polling. Short of obtaining White House-commissioned polls, it is impossible to define the precise role that events play in polling. Regardless, the variation in spending reflects the idiosyncratic usage of polling within the Bush administration.

Why Poll?

Presidential documents and interviews with White House staff and pollsters from past administrations suggest that presidents use polling for two primary reasons. The first is tactical. Given the limited resources available to them, new presidents must determine the best way to sell their agenda, minimizing costs and maximizing their influence. Campaign professionals, armed with state-of-the-art public opinion technology and an "outside the Beltway" perspective on pressing issues and problems, provide a service that the modern White House is unequipped to offer. The second reason, rooted in democratic theory, is a president's desire to represent his constituents by acting in consonance with a majority of the public. Although the Bush administration is willing to admit it uses polls to help package and sell its policies to the public, it regards as heresy any suggestion that it follows the polls (even the Clinton administration denied that it used polls for this purpose).

Regardless, presidential pollsters from all administrations since Nixon's have been known to poll on foreign and domestic issues alike. Nixon polled about Vietnam and about admitting China to the United Nations. Carter surveyed American attitudes toward Israel and the Iran hostage crisis. Reagan tracked polls on the Iran-Contra affair and the Marine barracks bombing in Lebanon. During President George H.W. Bush's administration, pollsters Robert Teeter and Fred Steeper conducted polls and focus groups both before and during the Gulf War. Examples of polling on domestic policy—busing, agriculture, government regulation, bilingual education, health care policy, energy, and the budget—abound. Presidential pollsters provide additional data before midterm elections and become pivotal during the president's reelection campaign. Typically, the fourth year of the president's term generates the highest spending on polling. Speech content is another area where pollsters can provide useful advice. Finally, all presidential pollsters need to collect national tracking polls on a regular basis to provide an internal baseline to compare against other polls. In short, presidential polling is a staple of the modern presidency.

Consumer of Polls: The Bush Political Machine

The way one political insider explained President Bush's atti-

Table 1.
National Party Presidential Polling Expenditures
(In 2002 dollars)

ADMINISTRATION	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	TOTAL
Reagan –			
Richard Wirthlin	1,635,000	2,531,000	4.1 million
Bush I –			
Robert Teeter	831,683	470,811	1.3 million
Clinton –			
Stanley Greenberg	2,433,000	2,415,000	4.8 million
Bush II –			
Jan van Lohuizen and Fred Steeper	715,771	947,422	1.7 million

*Data for the current administration obtained on-line from fec.gov with the assistance of Elizabeth Redman and Larissa Davis of the Brookings Institution, April 2003. All other data obtained by author from the Federal Election Commission.

tude toward polling reinforced the president's campaign mantra: "One of the worst arguments a White House adviser can make to the president is to say that 'the polls show X.'" But despite the president's disdain for public opinion polls, he has created a formidable White House political operation that focuses closely on them. The Office of Strategic Initiatives monitors and analyzes the results of numerous public surveys by major networks and news organizations as well as the findings of privately commissioned polls. And access to state surveys and other polls conducted by GOP pollsters informs their analyses. Why does the nature of the White House political operation matter? Because no amount of polling is worthwhile unless it is properly analyzed and incorporated into White House policy and political discussions.

President Bush's chief political confidant, Karl Rove, is considered by Republicans and Democrats alike to be an extraordinarily shrewd presidential adviser. On entering the White House in 2001, Bush established the first White House Office of Strategic Initiatives and appointed Rove its director—giving him a perch from which to survey the political landscape with the aim of expanding the president's electoral coalition in 2004. Unlike Bush's father, who placed his chief political adviser, Lee Atwater, at the helm of the RNC, George W. Bush understands the importance of proximity. Though the president deliberately distances himself from pollster Jan van Lohuizen (political insiders claim the two rarely meet), his close relationship with Rove virtually ensures a key role for polling in presidential policymaking.

Assisting Rove as chief political adviser is Matthew Dowd, the RNC senior adviser who coordinates the pollsters and analyzes the political pulse with the help of van Lohuizen, who conducts focus groups as well as national surveys. And Fred Steeper, 1992 campaign pollster for Bush's father, is assigned a variety of special projects that address specific research questions, some of which involve focus groups. Combining the less "scientific" focus groups with polling enables the political shop to determine what people are thinking and then test those attitudes rigorously through national surveys. Unlike survey research, the focus group

allows researchers to present text from a speech or a segment of a television ad and gauge the intensity of emotions, observe body language, and probe more deeply on key issues. The focus group alone may not be especially helpful, but combined with survey research, it can create a more refined questionnaire that zeroes in on previously tested issues and preferences. Similarly, the focus group technique can be applied after a national survey to probe specific questions and issues. The Steeper–van Lohuizen team clearly enhances the value of survey research while the Rove–Dowd–van Lohuizen/Steeper chain of command ensures that the pollsters stay well outside the political circle—and away from the eyes of the White House press corps.

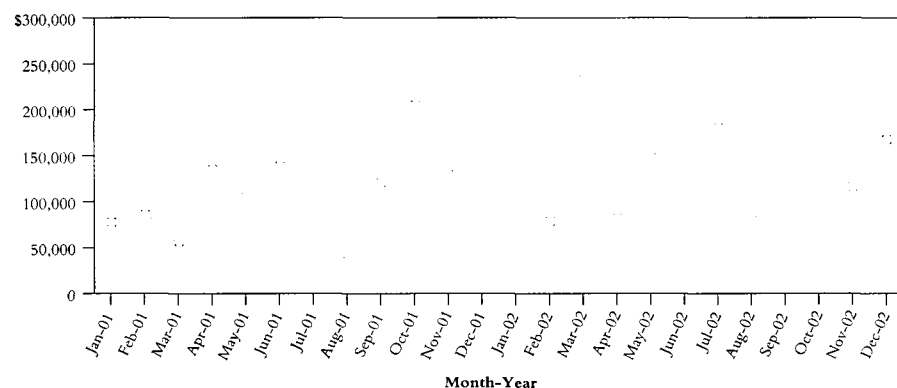
The final part of this well-oiled political machine is the White House Office of Political Affairs director and recipient of polling data, Ken Mehlman. Since the Reagan administration, this office has become a standard component of all White House political operations, but its influence depends largely on the president and his chief aides. The first President Bush downplayed the office, and it experienced high turnover during the first term of the Clinton administration. But in today's White House, Ken Mehlman's job is deemed an important one—though unlike Karl Rove's macropolitical strategy, Mehlman tends to the care and feeding of state and local partisans in hopes of paving the way for victory in 2004.

White House Polling in Perspective: Perception Is Everything

President Bush's use of polling is by no means pathbreaking, nor is the amount of polling particularly astounding. What is unusual about the Bush team's polling operation is the chasm between its words and actions. Never before has a White House engaged in such anti-polling rhetoric or built up such a buffer between the pollsters and the president. The placement of longtime Bush loyalist Dowd at the RNC to coordinate the polling means that the pollsters do not have contact with the White House. Such unusual behavior reflects a broader tension between a determined attempt to avoid the mistakes of Bush the elder—especially the failure after the Persian Gulf War to

consider the implications of a stagnant economy for the 1992 reelection campaign—and a continuous effort to shed the vestiges of the Clinton administration. The Bush team fully understands the value of polling, but the perceived overuse of polling within the Clinton administration has led to serious overcompensation, which in turn has bred secrecy and denial. All presidents are subjected to the pressures of the "permanent campaign." Information is integral to any successful presidency. Polling is part of a broader game of politics and policymaking. No one can dictate how presidents use polls, but denying the role of polls in the policy process is fruitless. ■

Figure 1.
Republican National Committee Polling Costs, 2001–2002



*Data obtained from fec.gov with the assistance of Larissa Davis and Elizabeth Redman of the Brookings Institution, April 2003.

Since the publication in 1971 of David Broder's influential book *The Party's Over*, pundits and scholars have written of the decline of political parties. Although observers now recognize a party "revival" of sorts in Congress, within the electorate, and in the recruitment and funding of congressional candidates, most regard presidential nominations as driven by momentum, money, and the luck of the state-by-state sequence of contests. Few analysts see signs of party influence. We hope to put another nail in the coffin of the party-decline thesis by arguing that party elites have regained a large measure of control in presidential nominations.

primary public support reliably determines the outcomes of presidential primaries. But our observation of nominations has led us to believe that party insiders also play a big role. To test this possibility, we developed a measure of insider support for presidential candidates by tallying all publicly reported endorsements in a broad range of publications, including local and national newspapers, political magazines and newsletters, news wires, and Internet sources. The measure covers all candidates in contested nominations from 1980 to 2000 and is based on endorsements made before the Iowa caucus.

Some of the endorsements, which averaged roughly 300 to 400 per con-

share; each 1 percent of pre-Iowa endorsements adds 0.60 percent of delegate share.

These results, however, are ambiguous. The party insiders who make endorsements do so against a backdrop of nearly continuous polls about voter preferences. What if these endorsers simply follow these polls? They would have several incentives to do so. They might want to choose a poll front-runner to settle on a winner as quickly as possible to avoid intra-party bloodshed. They might simply want to pick a popular candidate. Some endorsers, wishing to ingratiate themselves with the likely winner, might jump on the poll leader's bandwagon. In any of these

Pollson or Pols?

The Real Driving Force Behind Presidential Nominations

By Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller

Polls vs. Pols

In his recent essay "Forecasting Presidential Nominations," William Mayer shows that polls taken before the start of presidential primary voting predict candidate primary vote shares extremely well from 1980 to 2000. We have collected data that show the same thing. Across all contested nominations since 1980, the final Gallup poll before the Iowa caucus explains around 90 percent of what happens in the state-by-state voting. (In technical terms, the correlation between pre-Iowa polls and delegates won in the primaries is $r=.93$.)

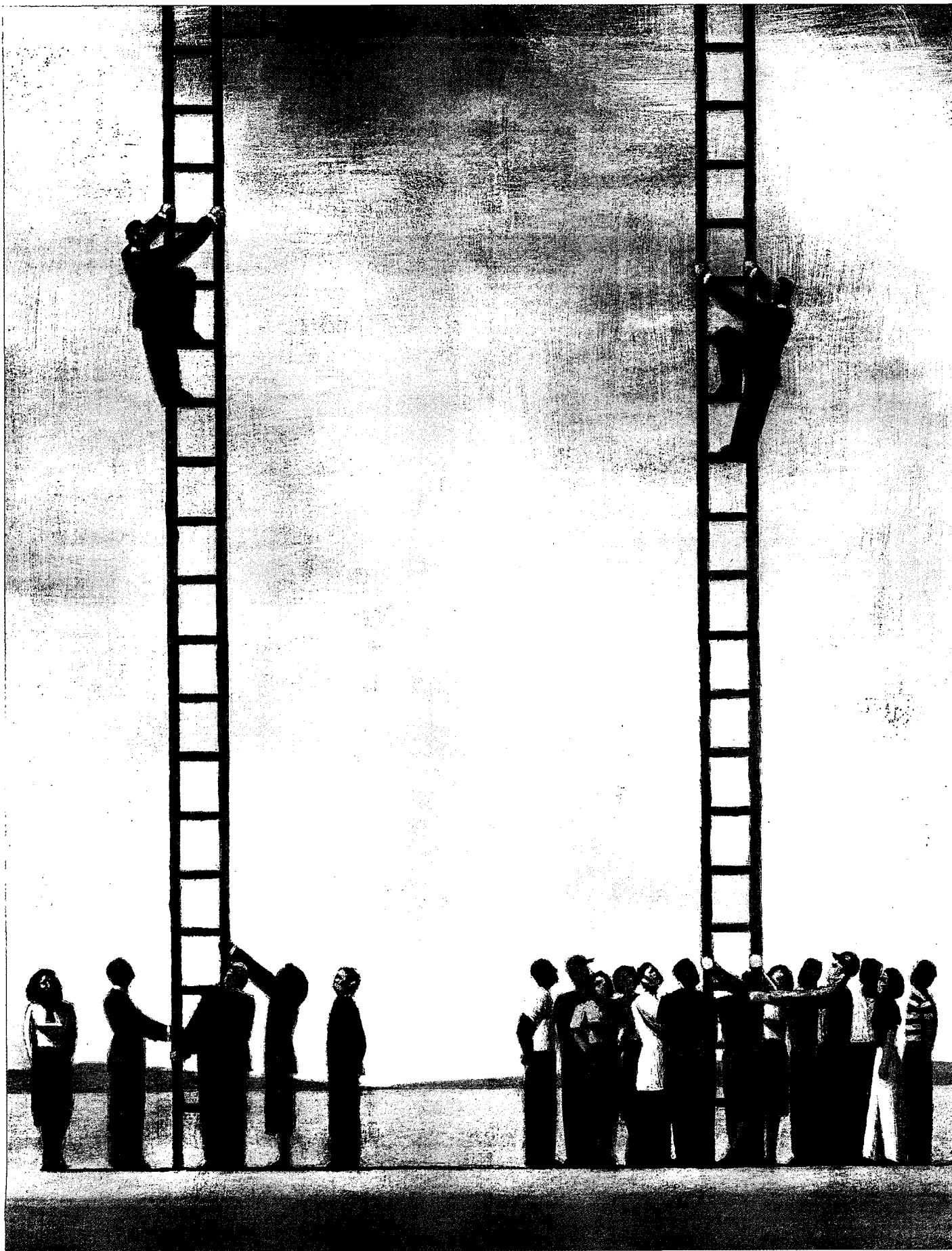
Taken at face value, this correlation seems to show that a candidate's pre-

test, were more important than others. In 2000, for example, Michael Jordan endorsed Bill Bradley and Bill Clinton endorsed Al Gore. To capture such differences, we sorted endorsers into categories—celebrity, state legislator, incumbent president—and asked knowledgeable coders to rate the significance of people in each category. We then weighted our endorsement measures according to these judgments so that each candidate's score could be interpreted as his or her percentage share of politically important endorsements. The correlation between the share of delegates won in the primaries and the weighted endorsements is .89, which is nearly as high as that between poll share and delegate share. Moreover, a multiple regression analysis shows that polls and endorsements are almost equally important predictors of primary outcomes: each 1 percent of pre-Iowa poll share adds 0.68 percent of delegate

scenarios, public support, as measured in polls, would be the real cause of primary success, and endorsements would be secondary.

But an entirely different scenario is equally tenable. Political insiders know that pre-Iowa polls may reflect little more than name recognition—and perhaps confused recognition at that. In the current cycle, supporters of John Edwards joke nervously that their candidate's poll standing may be partly due to confusion with the popular psychic from the television show "Crossing Over." One might expect, then, that party leaders, who know much more about the candidates than do rank-and-file voters, make independent judgments. They may judge that the poll leader would make a poor general election candidate or a poor president. Or they may want to back a winner, but one who is acceptable to party interests. Insider cues might directly shape the

Marty Cohen and Hans Noel are doctoral candidates and John Zaller is professor of political science at UCLA. David Karol is a visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School.



SCOTT ROBERTS

opinions of some voters or might lead to increased media coverage that in turn affects voter opinion.

Which alternative is it? Do polls drive endorsements or do endorsements drive polls? The answer is that both scenarios have some importance, but one is much more important. According to our statistical analysis, changes in either polls or endorsements at an early time lead to changes in the other at later times. But the influence is strikingly asymmetrical: endorsements influence polls about three times more than polls influence endorsements.

We regard this as a major finding. We saw earlier that pre-Iowa polls and endorsements overwhelmingly determined the outcome of the primaries, with each having roughly equal impact. Now we see that these polls and endorsements are formed in a process in which opinion polls respond to party insiders much more than party insiders respond to polls. Together, these findings imply that party insiders mainly drive the dynamics of presidential nominations.

To be sure, the support of party insiders does not guarantee success. Presidential nominations are still fought and won in the primaries. A candidate who enjoys massive insider support but campaigns poorly or runs up against a very strong opponent may fail to be nominated. Such was nearly the fate of Walter Mondale in 1984. If party establishments choose wisely, their candidates will usually prevail, but nothing in our analysis ensures this result.

Our findings also depend on the degree to which insiders agree among themselves. In almost every year, they reach a strong pre-Iowa consensus. But consensus is not inevitable. In 1988, Democrats failed to settle on a nominee ahead of Iowa, leaving it to primary voters rather than to insiders to nominate Michael Dukakis.

Nor do our findings show that party insiders make decisions independent of public opinion. Insiders are acutely sensitive to voter sentiment, as would be expected in any nomination process. They simply do not take polls as the only indicator of popular appeal.

Parties in Contemporary Presidential Nominations

We have so far called these endorers “party insiders.” But perhaps they are too loose a collection of influential individuals to be considered a real party. In what sense, indeed, are they a party, and what is the basis of their power? Furthermore, how do these party insiders go about deciding whom to support?

In his classic 1942 book, *Party Government*, E. E. Schattschneider defines parties as an organized attempt to gain control of government through elections and says that the most important activity of party members is to form a “united front” behind candidates capable of winning office. Other definitions exist, but this one is reasonable, admirably general, and widely used. And by this definition, the presidential endorers in our study do constitute a party. Our data show that they often work for their chosen

party over long periods of time, in many different contests, and in all parts of the country. As regards presidential nominations, the endorers make strenuous efforts to form a united front and almost always succeed. For example, leaders of the religious right in the Republican party have ignored factional candidates like Pat Robertson and Gary Bauer and lined up instead behind candidates more capable of uniting the party and winning the fall election. A similar argument can be made for organized labor in the Democratic party. In these ways, the endorers in our study are much more like a party than a collection of mere candidate enthusiasts.

The support of party insiders might be unimportant if the voters who determine presidential nominations all lived in one small state. A rich or charismatic or merely skilled politician might be able, by his or her own exertions, to assemble the resources necessary to win an election in a single small state. But no individual candidate can contest 50 separate state elections in a short time without a great deal of help—the most natural source of which is the pool of

people who regularly work, raise money, and campaign for a party. A few candidates—Pat Robertson in 1988 and Steve Forbes in 1996 and 2000—have been able to run campaigns without tapping into party networks. But for most candidates in most elections, the need to compete for office over a vast area makes them dependent on party regulars for help. When, as has happened in recent elections, most of these partisans mass behind one candidate, that candidate gains an important advantage over the rest of the field.

If the invisible primary is the most important phase of the nomination process, how does it work? Savvy candidates know who the party insiders are

Our findings imply that party insiders mainly drive presidential nominations and that polls have secondary importance.

and travel the country building support among those who control the resources necessary to mount a mass campaign. As in 1960, when a minor senator from Massachusetts trounced the powerful majority

leader of the Senate, standing in national politics is not a particularly important asset. What seems to matter instead are insiders’ estimates of each candidate’s character, skill, positions on key party issues, and electability. The 1980 election nicely illustrates these and other general features of the nomination process. In early 1979, Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford topped preference polls of Republican voters, with Reagan generally ahead of Ford by a small margin. Reagan had also spent many years traveling the country and impressing local party officials with his character and vision. Hence, Reagan took a strong lead in the endorsement derby. But many Republicans, recalling the Barry Goldwater debacle of 1964, wanted someone more moderate. Ford tried to capitalize on this feeling, but insiders worried about his poor electoral performance in 1976. Hence, despite his poll standing, Ford never won significant party support and eventually decided not to enter the primaries. The next most likely moderate alternative to Reagan was Howard Baker, the Senate minority leader who had become a national icon during the

Watergate hearings. But despite poll support hovering around 10 percent throughout 1979, Baker never attracted many endorsements. George H. W. Bush, though nearly invisible in the polls, was able to use his legendary network of personal relationships to garner endorsements, raise money, build a campaign organization, and become the principal alternative to Reagan. Briefly, during the Iowa and New Hampshire campaigns, it appeared that Bush might even beat Reagan. Meanwhile, Democrat-turned-Republican John Connally raised more early money than anyone else by tapping his personal network of Texas millionaires, but he won relatively few endorsements and, when primary voting began, little public support.

Scenarios like these have played out many times since. In every cycle, estimable national politicians present themselves to party insiders as candidates for the presidency, but most get no further. In 1988 an unusually impressive trio of power players—Paul Laxalt, Al Haig, and Donald Rumsfeld—tested the waters but failed to win enough insider support to mount a campaign. That same year, Gary Hart, the runaway early poll leader, could not win the endorsements of his peers even before the Donna Rice affair drove him from the race.

Similarly, in 1992 Jerry Brown led Bill Clinton three to one in early polls but nonetheless got trounced by the Arkansan—first in the endorsement derby and then in the primaries. Former vice president Dan Quayle might have expected to be a strong candidate for his party's nomination in 1996 or 2000. But in both contests, his efforts to secure the nomination were rebuffed by the establishment, leading him to withdraw before voters had a chance to render their verdict.

The 2000 Republican nomination is a textbook illustration of insider influence. Just two weeks after Bill Clinton was inaugurated in 1997, Ronald Brownstein wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, "The great mentioners scoping out potential GOP candidates for the year 2000 already have their eyes on at least half a dozen governors. Everyone's list starts with Bush." Six weeks later,

Brownstein added, "Almost every day, some prominent Republican calls Karl Rove, Bush's chief political strategist, offering to enlist for 2000 as soon as the governor gives the word." This clearly is the kind of insider support that makes for successful candidacies. At the same time, however, Bush was the front-runner in every poll taken. What, then, was driving his candidacy—the judgment of insiders that he would make a strong candidate or the polls? On the basis of the statistical analysis reported earlier, we can say that if Republican insiders had massed behind Elizabeth Dole or especially John McCain, Bush would probably not have won his party's nomination—or perhaps even entered the race.

But Republican insiders were unlikely to have massed behind McCain. They distrusted the Arizona maverick for many reasons, especially his support of campaign finance reforms that they believed would disadvantage the Republican party. Yet McCain could have been at least as formidable a campaigner as Bush. As already noted, party insiders are looking for someone who can win and who can be an effective leader for their party. Polls have some relevance for the former, but almost none for the latter.

Does Money Predict Presidential Nominations?

We should not end without saying a few words about the role of money in presidential nominations. As would be expected, pre-Iowa fund-raising predicts success in the primaries, but it predicts much less well than either pre-Iowa endorsements or pre-Iowa polls. Moreover, in a statistical analysis that controls for polls and endorsements, the effect of money falls to near zero—a finding that suggests that the direct power of money in presidential nominations is less than usually assumed. No insider favorite ever lacks for funds, but several important examples—John Connally in 1980, Pat Robertson in 1988, Phil Gramm in 1996, and Steve Forbes in the last two contests—attest that money alone does not go far toward a nomination. Candidates who drop out complaining about the difficulty of raising the vast sums of money needed to compete for office

would be more honest if they admitted that party insiders were unwilling to support their candidacies.

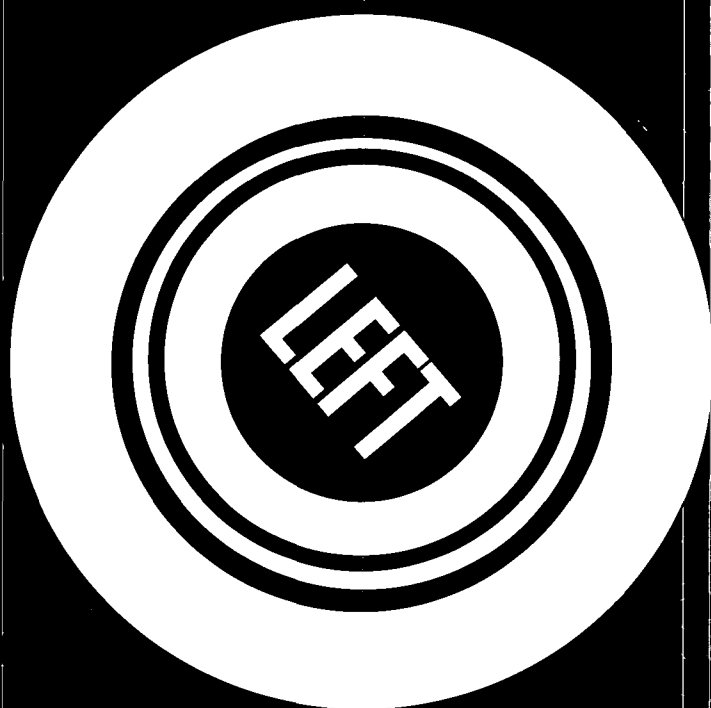
How Insiders Shape Presidential Choices

Some observers may be heartened by our conclusions that presidential nominations are driven neither by polls nor by money. But should we worry, then, that party insiders are too powerful? There is some reason to do so. The party establishments that we believe largely control presidential nominations tend to be more ideologically polarized than the American electorate, and their partisan interests may further lead them to oppose policies, like campaign finance reform, that most Americans favor. But party insiders have two important attributes going for them. First, they are usually familiar with the candidate they choose to support. Sometimes they will have worked with the person in some capacity, and in most cases they will have a personal acquaintance or at least direct personal observation of the candidate in action. Such peer review has been considered vital to ensuring the character and ability of presidents ever since the time of the Founders. The second important advantage of party insiders is that they are, in Schattschneider's sense, a party. That is, they are concerned with working with one another to gain control of the government on behalf of a general program, and they are recognized as such by the majority of voters. This induces in them sensations of responsibility and accountability that are likewise vital to democratic governance.

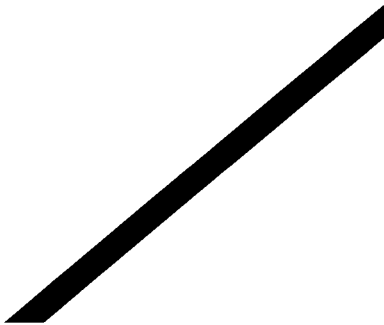
With their ideological programs, interest group ties, and personal ambitions, party establishments are far from being the humble servants of popular sovereignty. Yet they have information and incentives that make them useful and perhaps even good servants. Their influence in presidential nominations makes for a system in which, whatever the perils of the times, voters should always have a general election choice between candidates of character and ability who differ on many issues. This is no small thing for a party system to deliver. ■

Postindustrial Hopes

By Ruy Teixeira



**DEMOCRATIC
LIKELY
TO EMERGE**



Early during the summer of 2002, as the economy slowed and the winds of scandal swept through Washington and Wall Street, it looked as if the Democrats might win big in November, despite the post-September 11 boost in the GOP's fortunes. But the two-month-long preelection debate over war with Iraq, initiated and orchestrated by the Bush administration, capped by Bush's barnstorming tour of key states right before the election, ensured GOP success. The Democrats did well in some key gubernatorial contests—Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Arizona—where talk of war had relatively little effect, but they did not claim the majority toward which they have been moving, by fits and starts, since 1996. Before this decade is over, however, the Democrats are likely to complete this journey, moving the country from a conservative Republican majority to a progressive Democratic one.

Particular elections depend on a host of contingencies, from the quality of candidates to the money at their disposal to outside events that help one party much more than the other, as in the 2002 election. But political trends are the product of deeper shifts within society and the economy. The old New Deal Democratic majority, which reigned from 1932 to 1968, was based in the industrial North and the segregated South. The conservative Republican majority of the 1980s exploited dissatisfaction with the civil rights movement and the 1960s counterculture to win the white South and parts of the ethnic North. Those areas, combined with the Republicans' traditional base in the farms of the prairies and the boardrooms of the North, gave the party a majority that lasted until the early 1990s. Since then, however, a new Democratic majority—different from both its New Deal ancestors and its conservative Republican rivals—has been emerging.

The Spread of the Ideopolis

This new Democratic majority is rooted in the growth of a postindustrial economy. The old industrial economy was based in cities and organized around assembly-line manufacturing, farming, and mining; the new postindustrial economy is based in large metropolitan areas—or “ideopolises”—that include cities and suburbs and are organized around the production of ideas and services. Many ideopolises, such as metropolitan Boston, Silicon Valley, or the Seattle area, hug the North and

far West, but others, like North Carolina's Research Triangle, the Maryland and Virginia suburbs of Washington, and the Tucson and Phoenix areas in Arizona, dot the nation.

During the 1980s, many ideopolises voted Republican; in the 1990s they began to elect Democrats. And the Democratic party itself began to change to reflect the priorities of these people, including growing numbers of professionals and technicians, from computer programmers and financial analysts to teachers and nurses.

A quarter or so of the jobs in Austin, Raleigh-Durham, Boston, or San Francisco are held by workers like these, many of whom are women who have joined the workforce since the 1960s. Plentiful, too, are low-level service and information workers, including waiters, hospital orderlies, sales clerks, janitors, and teachers' aides, many of whom are Hispanics and African-Americans. Together, professionals, women, and minorities, bolstered by blue-collar workers attracted to the Democrats' stands on economic issues, have formed powerful coalitions that now dominate the politics of many ideopolises.

This politics emphasizes tolerance and openness. It is defined more by the professionals, many of whom were deeply shaped by the social movements of the 1960s, than by any other group. They worry about clean air and water, and when the market fails to provide these environmental goods, they call on government. They favor civil rights and liberties and good government. They disdain the intolerance and fundamentalism of the religious right. But they are also leery of the old Democratic politics of “big government” and large-scale social engineering.

Republicans can and do argue that not all of America is like Silicon Valley or Boston's Route 128. But during the past four decades America has become more like these areas—and less like the Mississippi Delta or the Texas Panhandle. A careful study of these postindustrial metropolitan areas indicates the varied ways they have developed. Some, like Silicon Valley or Colorado's Boulder area, boast large manufacturing facilities, but the manufacturing, whether of pharmaceuticals or of semiconductors, involves applying complex ideas to physical objects. Other postindustrial metro areas like New York and Los Angeles specialize in producing entertainment, media, fashion, design, and advertising or in providing databases, legal counsel, and other business services. Most include major universities that funnel ideas and people into the hard or soft technology industries. Route 128 feeds off Harvard and MIT. Silicon Valley is closely linked to Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley. Dane County's biomedical research is tied to the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

How Do Ideopolises Vote?

A close look at 263 ideopolis counties that are part of these high-tech metro areas vividly illustrates the political impact of America's rising ideopolises. These counties, which account for 44 percent of the nation's vote, are among its most dynamic, fastest-growing areas. Between 1990 and 2000, the average ideopolis county grew 23 percent, while non-ideopolis counties—centered on less technically advanced cities like

Ruy Teixeira, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation, is coauthor with John Judis of The Emerging Democratic Majority (Scribner, 2002).

Greenville, South Carolina, or Muncie, Indiana, or in rural areas—grew an average of only 10 percent.

The Democrats have come to dominate these ideopolis counties. In 1984, for instance, the ideopolis counties went for Ronald Reagan by 55 percent to 44 percent. But in 2000, Al Gore garnered 55 percent of their votes as against 41 percent

for George Bush. And if left-wing candidate Ralph Nader's 3 percent share is included, the total Democratic-leaning vote in America's ideopolises can be reckoned at close to 58 percent. Republicans' strength is now in the smaller low-tech and rural counties, where Gore lost to Bush

by 53 percent to 44 percent. Indeed, since 1980, the beginning

of the Reagan era, almost all the pro-Democratic change in the country has been concentrated in America's ideopolis counties. The Democrats have

become the party of the postindustrial future; the Republicans, the party of the industrial and agricultural past.

So What Happened in 2002?

These trends notwithstanding, the 2002 election was a poor one for Democrats nationwide. The primary cause was national security, sparked by the Iraq debate, which mobilized Republicans, especially conservative whites in rural and exurban areas, and moved many close elections into the Republican column (though Democratic demobilization because of an anemic Democratic campaign and program was also clearly at work). The white vote was important: Republicans made little headway among key Democratic groups like Hispanics.

Indeed, Hispanic support for Democrats was rock solid.

For example, in California, the one state where exit poll data are available, Democrat Gray Davis won the governor's race with 65 percent of the Hispanic vote. Republican Bill Simon won 24 percent of the Hispanic vote—the same share won by Republican Dan Lundgren in California's 1998 gubernatorial contest. In terms of the national vote for Congress, a Greenberg-Quinlan-Rosner postelection poll found that Hispanics supported the Democrats in 2002 by 62 percent—again nearly identical with 1998 exit poll figures, which showed 63 percent

Can the Republicans continue a politics that mobilizes their constituencies and demobilizes the Democrats'?

demobilization, if continued, would be a big plus for the GOP.

What's Ahead?

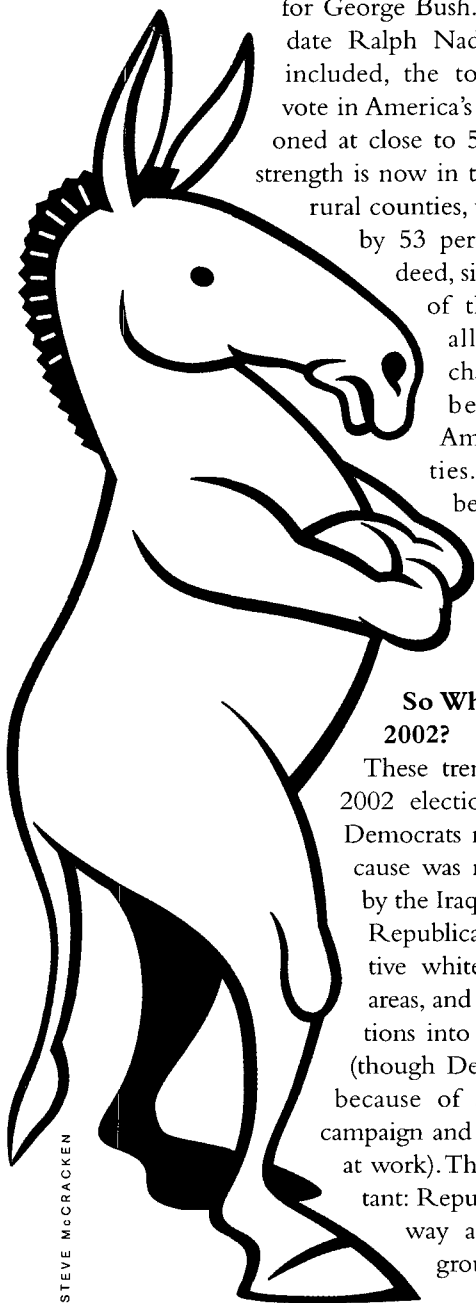
Can the Republicans continue a politics that mobilizes their constituencies and demobilizes the Democrats? Under certain scenarios, national security could continue to crowd out other issues and give Republicans the edge, as it did in 2002. But it is more likely that the importance of national security will ebb and flow and that it will become more, not less, contested between the parties. In this case, the underlying trends described here are likely to come to the fore and continue to move the country toward a new Democratic majority. But—and perhaps this is the chief lesson of the 2002 elections for the Democrats—that majority will not coalesce automatically. Imaginative political leadership, such as that displayed by Democrats in the 1990s, will be required.

One leadership challenge is to develop a national security policy that is a plausible alternative to that of the Republicans. Another is to offer voters a domestic policy agenda that goes beyond prescription drugs and defending Social Security—good but tired issues that did not capture voters' imaginations. New ideas abound on the Democratic side on both national security and domestic policy, but they must be articulated if they are to reach voters—both the swing voters lost in 2002 and the base voters who found the 2002 Democratic program uninspiring and stayed home.

But if Democrats can mobilize their base and compete vigorously for swing voters, the gathering impact of postindustrial change is clear. The spread of ideopolises over ever-wider sections of the country should continue to weaken Republicans, even in formerly "safe" states, and strengthen Democrats. That's why conservative Republican dominance is coming to an end and why a new Democratic majority is still likely by the decade's end. ■

Democratic support for Congress among Hispanics.

Political scientist James Gimpel of the University of Maryland confirms that Hispanic voting patterns held firm in the 2002 election. He finds that Hispanics in 10 states polled by Fox News (Texas, Florida, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Minnesota, Missouri, and South Dakota) supported Democrats over Republicans for the Senate by more than two to one (67 percent to 33 percent). Gimpel sees little evidence that Latinos, in general, are moving away from the Democratic party, despite all the talk about Hispanics as swing voters. He also finds, however, that poor turnout of Latinos did benefit the Republicans in 2002 and that Latino



The GOP

PROSPECTS LOOK GOOD FOR REPUBLICANS

IN '04

By Matthew Dowd

last year, Joshua Jacobs and Ruy Teixeira released their new book, *The Unwilling Democrats: Myth and Reality*, which argues that demographic changes over the past decade are moving the Democrats to majority status - and electing Republicans to suffer in elections. Well, a crazy thing happened on the way to this Democratic fair: the 2002 elections.

It seems obvious, but the key to understanding partisan voting trends and political dynamics is to look at election returns - who votes and how they vote. Analysis should focus not on who might possibly vote, but on what hap-

pens on election day. Many political commentators discuss partisan trends without giving due weight to "real" returns.

An examination of the 2002 election results shows the national Republican vote in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate races and in governors' races exceeding the Democratic vote by approximately 5 percentage points. And in each type of race - House, Senate, gubernatorial - Republican candidates won more than 49 percent of the votes cast, breaking the 49 percent barrier for the first time since 1994, something the Democrats have not done since 1992. Many pundits have argued that Republicans fared well and Democrats poorly because of two issues - terrorism and a possible war in Iraq. Although terrorism was a signifi-

cant issue, the dominant issue for voters was the economy. In both Democratic and Republican pre- and post-election polling, the number one issue was the economy and the American voting public elected Republicans over Democrats more on this issue by seven points! It wasn't terrorism that decided the 2002 elections; it was the economy.

Defying Demography

Although Jacobs and Teixeira point out interesting demographic trends that anyone in politics, including Republicans, should be cognizant of, their conclusion runs awry. Yes, if Republicans do not expand their constituency, they will suffer at the ballot box, but the same can be said for Democrats. For instance, if Democrats continue to lose ground

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among union households, white males, and stay-at-home moms, they will forever be the minority party. This fact underlines two fundamental flaws of *The Emerging Democratic Majority*.

First, its authors see demographics as dynamic but see political parties and candidates as static. Of course demographics and societal trends control much of the destiny of politics, but as we have seen over the past 200 years, political parties adapt and change fairly often. The Democratic party of the late 1800s, for instance, was very different from the party today. A



perfect example of adapting to changing demographics is the Republican ability to garner Latino votes in recent elections.

Latinos were once a solid part of the Democratic base. In 2002 Republican candidates hoped to garner 20–25 percent of their votes. According to Democratic pollsters, Republicans won some 39 percent of the Latino vote on average nationally. And in Colorado and Florida,

Republican governors won more than 50 percent of the non-Cuban Latino vote. If Republicans continue to do this well, then even with the tremendous growth expected among Latinos, Republicans are, at worst, in a neutral place.

Second, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* is based primarily on presidential election results. The authors use the 1992, 1996, and 2000 elections in arguing that these results reflect the Democratic base, without stating that 1992 was more about dissatisfaction with the economy and less about voters turning from one party to another. As the success of Republicans in the 1994 midterm elections demonstrated, the 1992 election was not about the rising preeminence of the Democratic Party. And in 1996 a popular incumbent president was running for reelection in a time of relative prosperity.

Democrats have not captured more than 50 percent in a presidential race in 27 years—the last time being Jimmy Carter’s narrow 1976 victory over then President Gerald Ford in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal. And Democrats have not captured a significant majority share (more than 51 percent) of the presidential vote in 39 years—when Lyndon Johnson ran for reelection in 1964 against Barry Goldwater.

The more telling races to examine for political trends are not the “one big” race run every four years, but the 435 congressional races run every two years and the nearly 7,400 state legislative races run every two or four years. And these results show quite a different “emerging majority.”

Today, for the first time since 1946, Republicans hold a majority of state legislative seats. In the past 12 years, while Democrats have supposedly been gaining political strength and “emerging” as a majority according to Teixeira and Judis, Democrats’ share of state legislative seats has fallen from 61 percent to just 49 percent.

By the Numbers

Congressional races over the past 10

years reveal a similar pattern. Republicans have held the House of Representatives for the longest sustained period since the 1920s, and their prospects for the future remain bright.

In 2002 Republican congressional candidates won more than 54 percent of the vote in 214 districts, while Democratic and Independent candidates carried more than 54 percent in 191 districts. The remaining 30 districts were more competitive, with no party winning more than 54 percent of the vote. In the 214 Republican districts, four, mainly in the Northeast, gave Democrat Al Gore more than 58 percent of the presidential vote in 2000. In the 191 Democratic districts, five, mainly in the South, gave George Bush more than 58 percent of the vote.

Let’s assume for argument’s sake that each party ultimately switches these seats—giving Republicans an additional net one district. So the breakdown becomes a Republican advantage of 215 to 190. How do the 30 fairly competitive districts break down? In eight districts, President Bush received more than 58 percent of the vote; in one, Al Gore received more than 58 percent of the vote. Let’s allocate those again, leaving 21 highly competitive districts, and a new breakdown of 223 likely Republican seats and 191 likely Democratic seats. Absent a major economic or foreign crisis, the prospect of Democrats recapturing a significant majority in Congress seems dim.

A word of caution: demographics and politics are each dynamic. The ability of one party to seize a stable majority is uncertain—as evidenced by the runoff election in Louisiana about a month after last November’s election, when Democratic incumbent Senator Mary Landrieu defeated her GOP opponent, running against the overall 2002 Republican tide. That election, too, emphasizes the axiom that, in many cases, candidates and campaigns do matter, in spite of long-term demographic change. But the majority possession arrow now points to the Republicans, and the 2004 election up and down the ballot should help clarify things. ■

From Hootie to Harry (and Louise)

By Burdett Loomis

Polling and Interest Groups

The American political system is a complex one, and it is one that is constantly in flux. The system is a product of the American people, and it is a system that is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the people. The system is a product of the American people, and it is a system that is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the people. The system is a product of the American people, and it is a system that is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the people.

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When Martha Burk, head of the relatively obscure National Council of Women's Organizations, challenged the Augusta National Golf Club, home of the Masters tournament, to admit women to its membership, Hootie Johnson drew on his experience with the corporate lords of American industry and finance, whose names dot the club's prestigious roster. In a public relations war, he reasoned, it's best to have the public with you. So he commissioned a survey from The Polling Company, a woman-owned firm whose clients include a variety of Republicans and conservative corporate interests.

Although Kellyanne Conway, The Polling Company's president, vigorously defended the poll, its wording left much to be desired. Respondents, for example, were asked to agree or disagree with these two items:

—Martha Burk did not really care if the Augusta National Golf Club began allowing women members, she was more concerned with attracting media attention for herself and her organization.

—In a way, Ms. Burk's actions are insulting to women, because it makes it seem that getting admitted to a golf club is a big priority to all women.

Survey research experts in both sports marketing and public polling concluded that the language was fatally flawed. "This was a survey to support the views of the people who paid for it," according to one marketing professional.

The Augusta National Golf Club does not represent a typical interest group in American politics. Nor was Johnson's polling effort—which was ham-handed at best—representative. If the public relations war over the Masters were the norm, the subject of polling and interest groups would be the stuff more of situation comedies than of situation rooms. Most organized political interests have much to teach Johnson about the sophisticated ways in which they use survey research methods to shape the strategies and tactics of lobbying. How these interests ply their trade, both inside the Beltway and, increasingly, in state capitals, is also worth our attention.

Polling results can be exceptionally powerful, largely because of their seeming legitimacy as neutral evidence. Even though many people report being skeptical of public opinion polls, these surveys do, however crudely, appear to reflect some kind of underlying reality. After all, aren't they "scientifically" conducted and accurate within a specific margin of error? Don't presidential election surveys ordinarily get the results roughly right? Besides, polling results are reported in numerical formats. If we can quantify something, that ordinarily

means that we can measure it with reasonable accuracy. And even the simplest poll permits the building of a narrative. Thus, when a newspaper needs a story about a campaign or an issue, it can order up a poll that will provide a handy narrative for even the least imaginative reporter—pretty much the *USA Today* model.

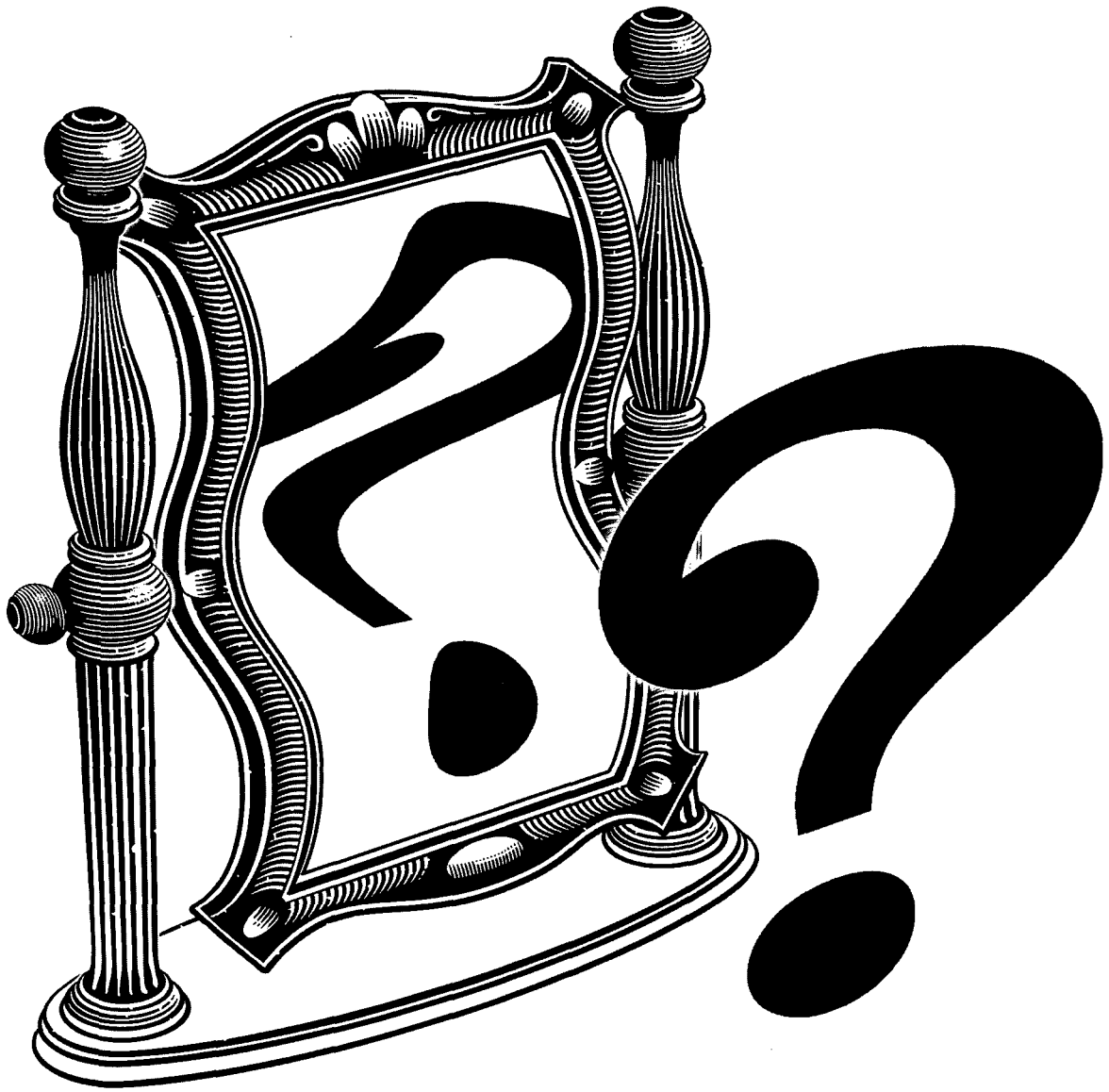
Lobbyists, consultants, and interest group leaders thoroughly grasp the value of controlling the story, and polling represents a major tool in establishing their themes—in driving how the press covers and how both the public and elites understand the subject at hand.

Organized Interests and Polling

Interest groups have long used survey research to provide support for their policy positions. Although rarely capable of doing their own polling, they regularly hire commercial firms to do the work. Indeed, directories of political consultants feature legions of polling firms experienced in performing such work. Increasingly, consulting firms have either established or purchased polling units. For example, the influential Washington-based Dutko Group recently added a public opinion research firm to its multiple lobbying and public relations units. Noted senior managing partner Gary Andres, "We're finding that on the lobbying side, we want to try to provide a full array of advocacy tools for our clients." From the lobbying perspective, then, survey research is an integral "advocacy tool."

Surprisingly, perhaps, political scientists who study organized interest groups rarely discuss polling. In a recent survey of research on interest groups, for example, Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leech make no mention of polling or survey research. Either political scientists consider polling too routine to be worthy of serious study, or they have simply ignored a potentially important element of group politicking—or both. Their silence about polling probably also reflects the differing vantage points from which students of survey research and interest groups view American politics. At any rate, the frequency with which organized interests underwrite surveys and publicize their results suggests that their use of this tool is more than merely routine.

Interest groups use survey research in two distinct ways. First, they often commission a poll and employ the findings in lobbying campaigns—either publicizing the results to frame an issue or holding them privately to help shape lobbying tactics. Frequently, they do both, releasing some findings, while using others to forge a plan of action. Alternatively, organized interests may mine existing polling data for findings that back their positions. With tremendous amounts of such data available, many interests unable to afford their own surveys can dig through other polls to find supporting material for their lobbying efforts. For example, Sane Guns, a moderate, low-budget gun control group, has presented widely available National Opinion Research Center data that demonstrate extensive public support for limits on certain kinds of weapons ownership, even among gun owners. The availability of such information tends to level the playing field, in that most citizen



STEVE McCracken

groups cannot afford to commission a first-rate national poll. Nevertheless, most interest groups' polling flows from commissions directed at specific issues and, frequently, specific populations.

Polling for Hire: Seeking Advantage

Survey research and lobbying appear to have quite different ends. The best polling practices work to eliminate all sources of bias, whether in question wording, sample selection, or post-survey weighting, while a lobbying firm comes at issues from a definite point of view, often with highly specific goals in mind. The job of a lobbyist is not to lie, of course, for breaking the bonds of trust with policymakers could kill a career in advocacy, built on mutual understanding. But advocacy is the job of the lobbyists, and their information will necessarily be "interested"—that is, framed to put their cases in the best possible light.

Organized interests use survey data in different ways as part of their lobbying strategy. Paradoxically, the more public the presentation, the more likely the groups are to manipulate the findings. The first way they use data is purely internal, much as a political campaign would analyze survey results in making

tactical decisions. They also use survey data in private exchanges with legislators, regulators, and other decisionmakers. Finally, they disseminate the polling data widely in hopes of influencing opinion leaders or the public at large.

When they use the survey results internally, groups want the most accurate data available to help them make the best possible strategic and tactical decisions. So it was when Verizon hired Public Opinion Strategies to help it oppose breaking the company up into separate entities. Public Opinion Strategies subsequently claimed that through survey research it "tested awareness of the proposal and gauged public reaction to possible consequences to Verizon's break-up." It also determined "which messages about Verizon's defense and which messages to deflate our opposition were more generally effective with the public. We used follow-up focus groups to fine tune the most compelling messages from the survey, and shape the language to better describe both the company and potential effects of the structural separation in our paid and earned media efforts [advertising and news coverage, respectively]." Any biases in the data would have reduced both the potential effectiveness of the Verizon campaign and the ability of Public Opinion Strategies to assess its own work. Even though survey

results did influence the content of public appeals, the data remained privately held.

When lobbyists approach legislators, they use polling numbers to present their best case. Lawmakers understand the nature of their exchanges with lobbyists, whether on a continuing or a one-shot basis. They expect to be told a story that reflects favorably on the group being represented. To be sure, lobbyists may well provide “the other side of the story” or “the downside” of their position, but, in the end, the legislator wants and needs solid evidence to back the group’s point of view. Selected polling results can thus offer lawmakers valuable support for the position they may take and the way they may explain it. As one consultant stated, “Polling renders all opinions not equal.” That is, he continued, “It’s one thing for a lobbyist to tell a senator his/her constituents support energy deregulation or tax cuts or whatever. But it’s more persuasive to say 65 percent of registered voters or 95 percent of your primary constituency support the policy.”

Beyond the selective use of figures, such a statement makes clear the value of a group’s ability to underwrite its own survey. A key interest group may care little about the overall distribution of opinion on a specific issue; its concerns may lie with the breakdown in the ten congressional districts or the five states where lawmakers remain undecided on the issue. And the most useful survey data may not even be those that report constituents’ feelings about the policy at hand. Rather, senators and representatives are often most interested in the political consequences of their actions. Thus, the crucial constituent response is not to the policy question “Do you support the president’s tax cut proposal?” but to the political question “If Senator Smith votes for the president’s tax cut proposal, would you be more or less likely to support her in the next election?”

Organized interests that can afford to conduct such surveys have a leg up in lobbying legislators, for the polls give them critical policy and political data that are both precise (as to numbers) and targeted (state or district). Especially when lawmakers are relatively indifferent on an issue, such information can be powerful. “Why,” a member of Congress might reason, “do I want to go against the wishes of my constituents and my own political self-interest to oppose this issue?” Moreover, rival interest groups would have to decide whether to try to generate their own polling data, which might sway the legislator in their direction. In the end, merely commissioning the survey and releasing key parts of it to targeted legislators can win the day for an interest willing and able to make the investment.

And what of interest group surveys whose results are widely disseminated? If the paradox of polling holds, these results should be the least reliable. The evidence is mixed here. To be sure, many interests do release self-serving results in the Augusta National Golf Club mold. But at the other end of the spectrum are first-rate surveys, such as those conducted when a firm that regularly works for, say, Republican interests is paired with one that normally works for Democratic interests. Thus, Democratic pollster Celinda Lake often joins forces with GOP pollsters such as Linda DiVall, John Deardourff, or Lance Tarrance on issues that cut across the partisan or ideo-

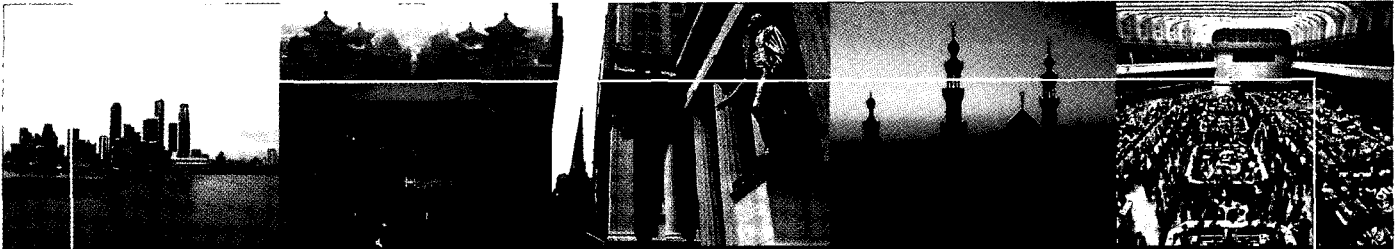
logical divide. Under these circumstances, surveys on campaign finance or civic engagement are often released in great detail. But their results rarely become the fodder for lobbyists, in that “good government” issues such as campaign finance reform often split normal partisan or ideological allies.

Perhaps most important here are surveys conducted by highly reputable firms for groups with an axe to grind on a particular policy issue. Should we be surprised when polling conducted for the health insurance industry comes up with findings that support the industry’s favored policies? At the same time, organized interests must consider the value of commissioning such studies given the possibility that their findings will be discounted.

A February 2003 survey conducted for the American Road and Transportation Builders Association by Zogby and Associates, for example, found solid support for modest tax increases to improve American highways, even as gasoline prices were rising. The Zogby firm did not release all question-wording and technical information, but it did provide a 10-page report on its Web site. Overall, the survey’s focus on transportation and highway issues encouraged respondents to think about highways in terms of national security and governmental infrastructure. Thus, after answering 20 questions along these lines, the respondents were asked if they would support a two-cent increase in the gas tax to be used for “roads, bridges, and mass transit.” Heavily primed by earlier questions and statements, the respondents supported the gas tax hike by a margin of 64 percent to 34 percent.

Zogby did not ask the sample to choose between a higher gas tax and a tax for better health care or more military spending or a stronger social security system. Rather, the results flowed directly from the question sequence and from framing transportation in a national security–national economy context. The road builders group and its affiliated Transportation Construction Coalition (28 national associations and construction unions committed to increased federal transportation investment) got what they wanted—firm support for a gas tax increase, articulated in a professional, random sample survey. But had Zogby been hired by a group that opposed such taxes, would the results have been different? And if respondents to the highway and transportation poll had opposed higher gas taxes, would the road builders group have released the results? These are, of course, rhetorical questions.

In the end, polling is a tool, and a costly one. On occasion, intensive polling and market research focus substantial attention on the framing of issues, as with the health insurance industry’s “Harry and Louise” ads opposing the Clinton administration’s health care initiatives during the early 1990s. More generally, the use of survey research disproportionately benefits those who can afford the polling results. And for every Hootie Johnson, exposed by poor survey practices and extensive scrutiny, a dozen transportation coalitions get just what they pay for—a chunk of seemingly neutral, reasonably legitimate data that becomes part of the policy debate inside the Beltway, nudging policymakers in the group’s desired direction. ■



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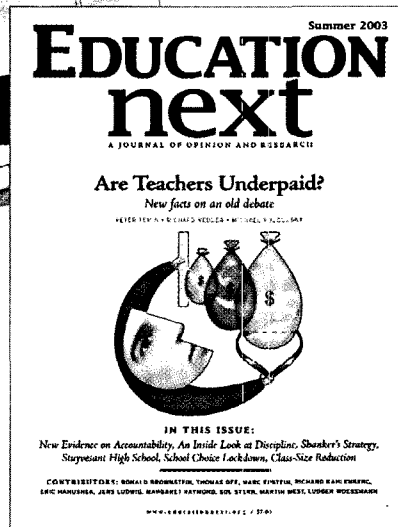
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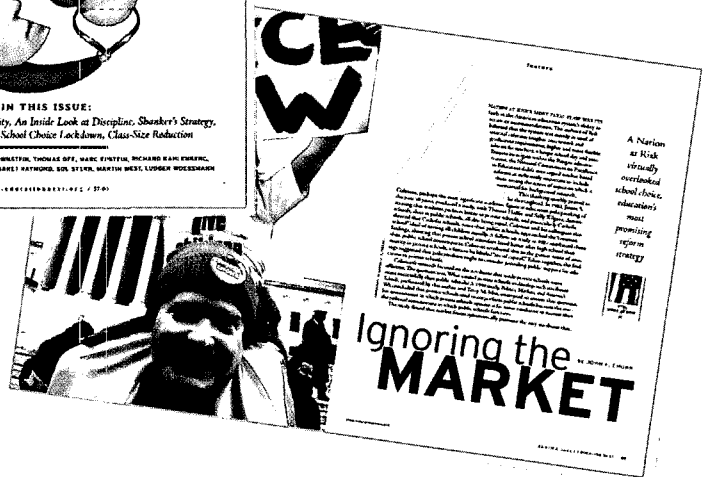


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